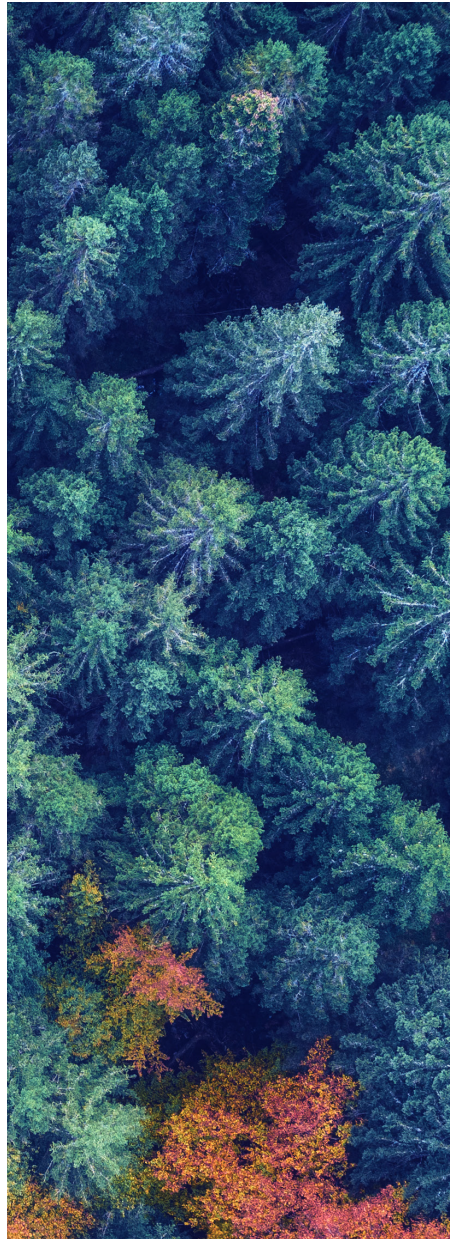
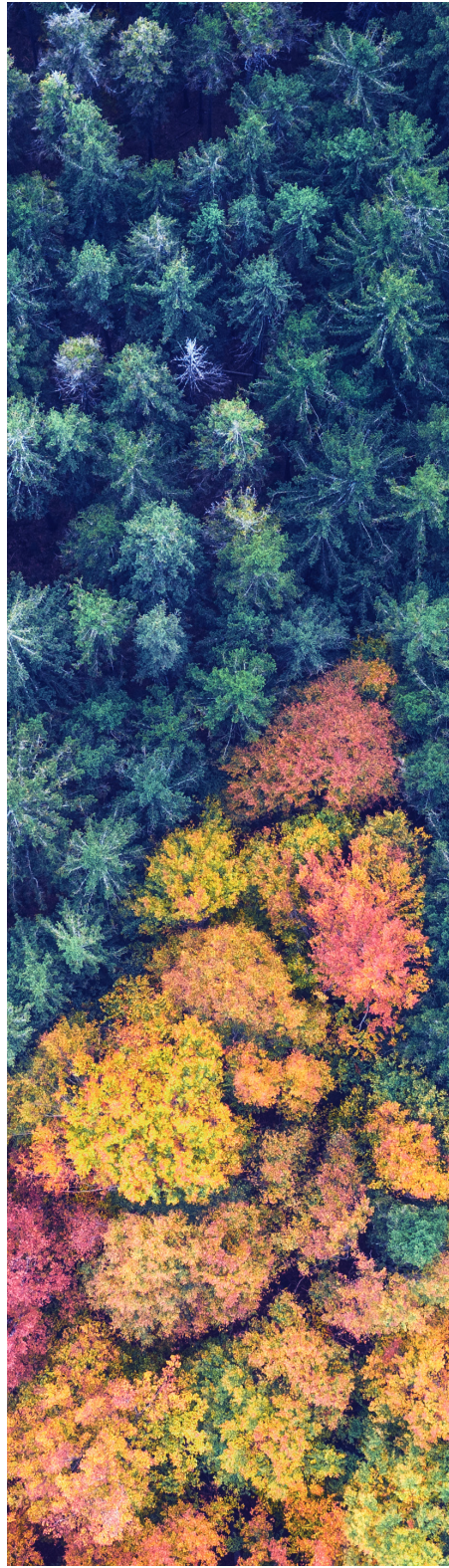
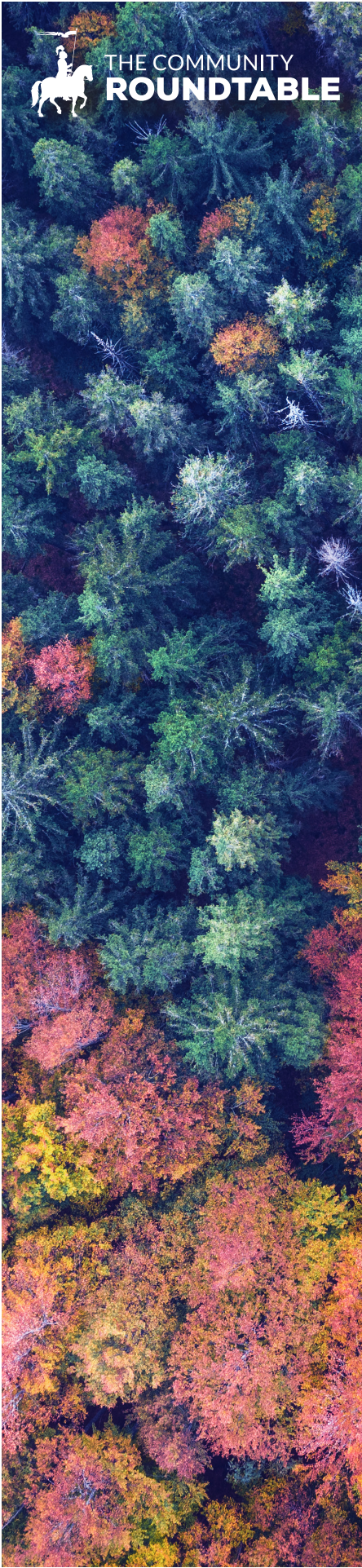




THE COMMUNITY
ROUNDTABLE



THE STATE OF
**COMMUNITY
MANAGEMENT
2023**

NAVIGATING A CHANGING LANDSCAPE

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Founded in 2005, iTalent Digital is one of Khoros's most established and capable global technology partners. iTalent's Community Management Center of Excellence and our ISO 27001-certified and SOC2-compliant Engineering and Quality Assurance Center of Excellence, both undergirded by deep systems integrations and customer support expertise, deliver the highest quality outcomes for our joint customers. iTalent's innovative work on the Khoros platform has earned us more than 20 industry awards.

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Higher Logic Vanilla exists to connect B2B and B2C brands to your customers through people, knowledge and ideas. At Higher Logic, our community platforms serve over 3,000 customers, representing over 350,000 online communities and 200+ million users – we have been leaders for 15 years on helping connect you to your customers.

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Welcome to the 14th edition of The State of Community Management research report, brought to you by The Community Roundtable.

Since 2009, we've remained committed to studying and understanding the best practices, strategies, and tactics employed in the online community industry. As the industry matures, we continue to gather knowledge and analyze community management practices across the eight competencies of the Community Maturity Model™.

This year, we are excited to once again highlight the “best-in-class” community segment, comprised of only 12% of survey respondents. These community programs stand out as having taken a thoughtful approach to building their communities and have achieved outstanding results. Through analyzing their practices and strategies in detail we are able to provide valuable insights that can be applied by any community professional to level up their program. Throughout this report you'll see references to “BIC” programs, and learn how you can strategically align your community practices to achieve even greater success.

As always, our [2023 State of Community Management Working Group](#) deserves a round of applause. These community leaders generously contributed their time, expertise, and insights to ensure the quality and relevance of this report. Their valuable input enriched our research and shaped the final publication.

Thank you for joining us on a continued exploration of the global state of community management.

PS: Throughout this report, we reference the Community Maturity Model™ (CMM), the Community Skills Framework™, and the Community Engagement Framework™. More about these foundational models and frameworks can be found starting on [page 65](#).

Methodology

The data in this report was collected from 244 community programs in January and February 2023. This research wouldn't be possible without the members of the State of Community Management Working Group.

2023 State of Community Management Working Group



Lisa Allison
Analog Devices, Inc



Peter Broadley
CSA Group



Ashleigh Brookshaw
C2m Digital, LLC



Helen Chen
Research Innovations, Inc.



Bri Leever
Ember



Kyle Pitocchelli
Vantage



Nicole Saunders
Zendesk



Becky Scott
JumpCloud

Research is solicited from The Community Roundtable's contact list, members, online audiences, and clients; as such, the data may not reflect encompassing industry trends. Instead, the research examines a portion of the community management space's experiences — one that tends to represent more mature community programs. After collection, The Community Roundtable's research team cleans, segments, and analyzes the data.

This year's research also includes trend analysis based on previous years' results. [Learn more](#) about past State of Community Management reports.

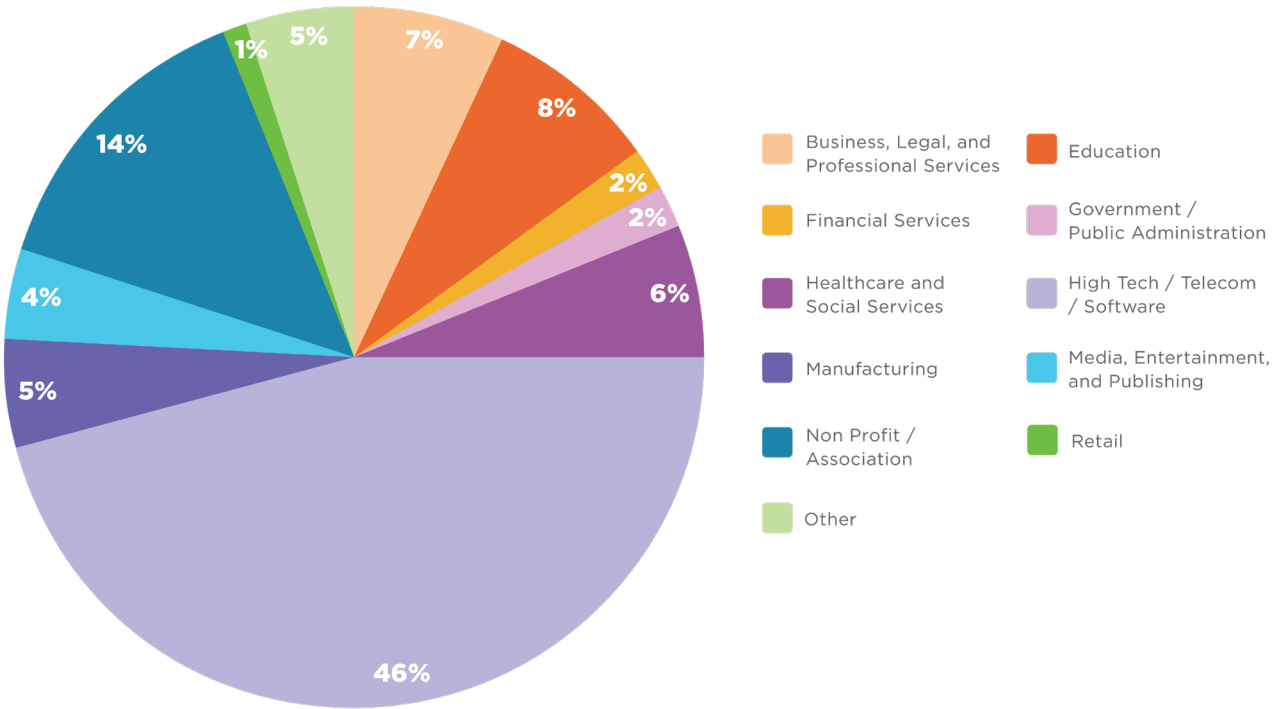
Demographics

The State of Community Management 2023 research participants represent a wide range of global community programs, including both internal, employee-facing programs and external, customer-facing programs. A myriad of community sizes, ages, industries, and use cases were represented. To effectively analyze and identify meaningful insights from this diverse group, data was segmented based on demographic differences.

Industry

The industries represented in this year’s research held steady from previous years. High tech/telecom/software continue to be the largest reporters, possibly due to the incredible, proven impact community programs have at these organizations.

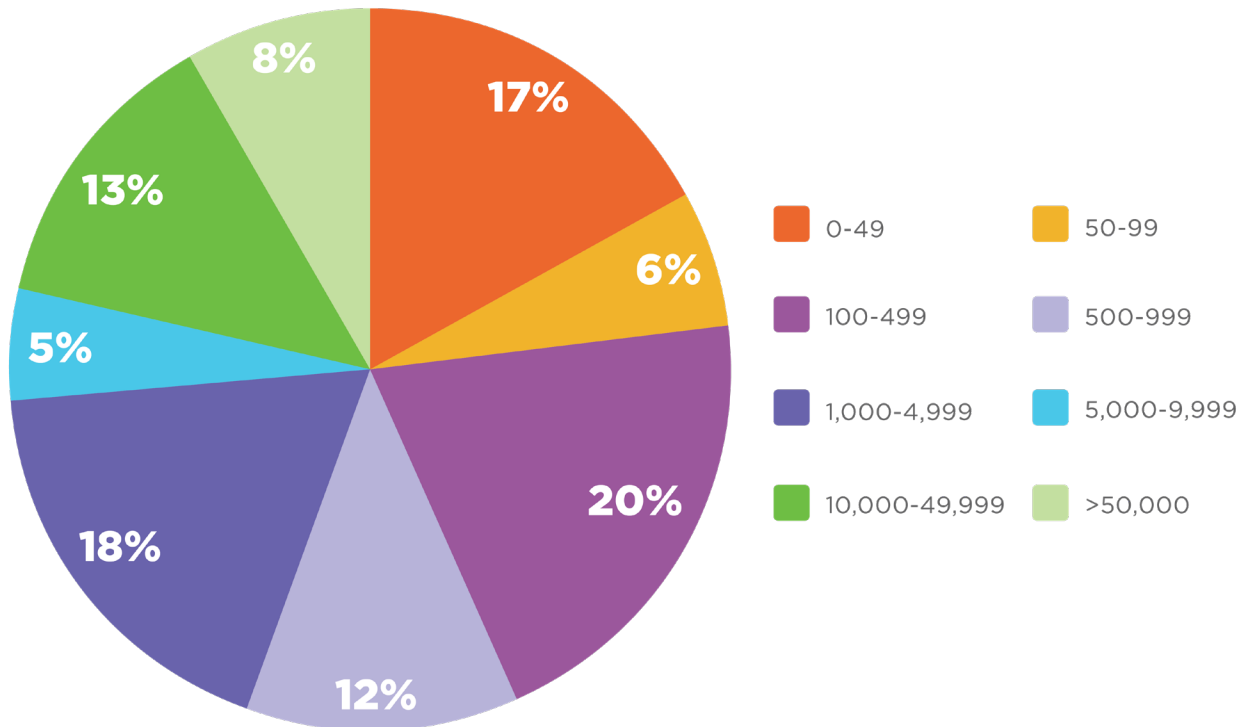
Industries (2023)



Organization Size

Last year, responses from small organizations (0-49 employees) doubled, jumping from 14% to 28%. This year that number is back in line with previous years (17%) while we saw a jump in responses from those at organizations employing 1,000-4,999 people (18% in 2023 vs. 12% in 2022).

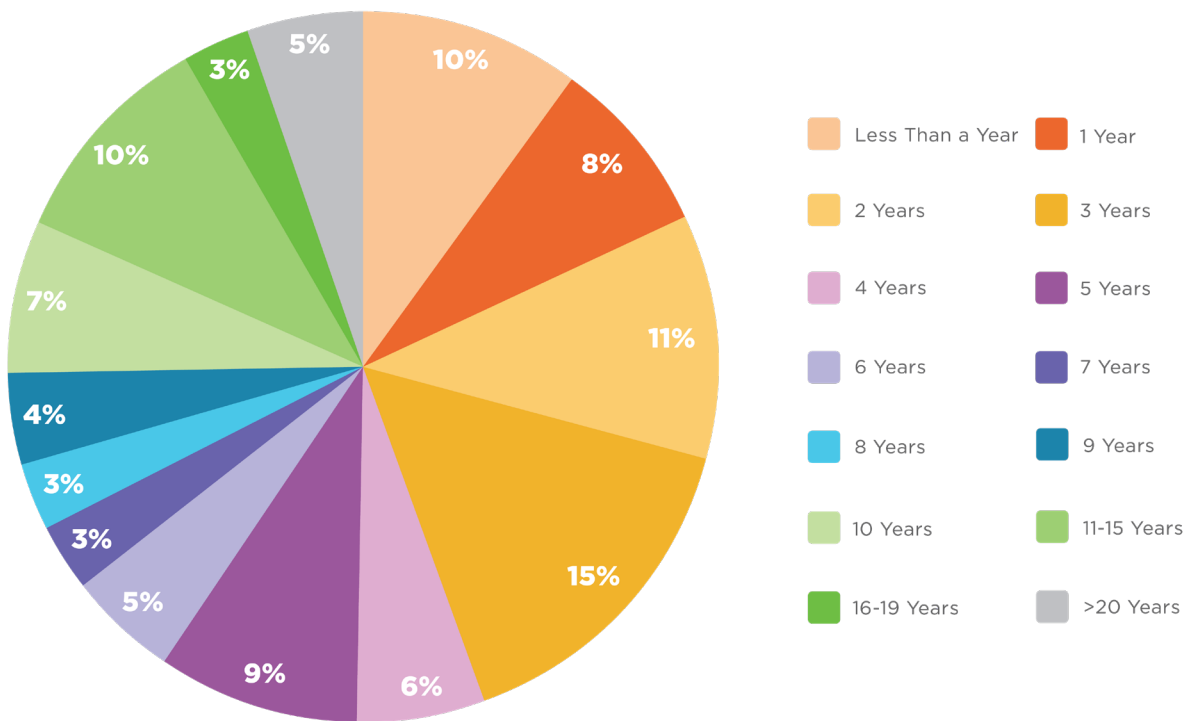
Organization Size (2023)



Community Age

The age of communities has stayed largely consistent over the past several years. Notably, respondents are evenly split between communities older than 4 years, or younger. This increase in younger communities may correlate with community programs becoming (even more) widespread.

Community Age (2023)



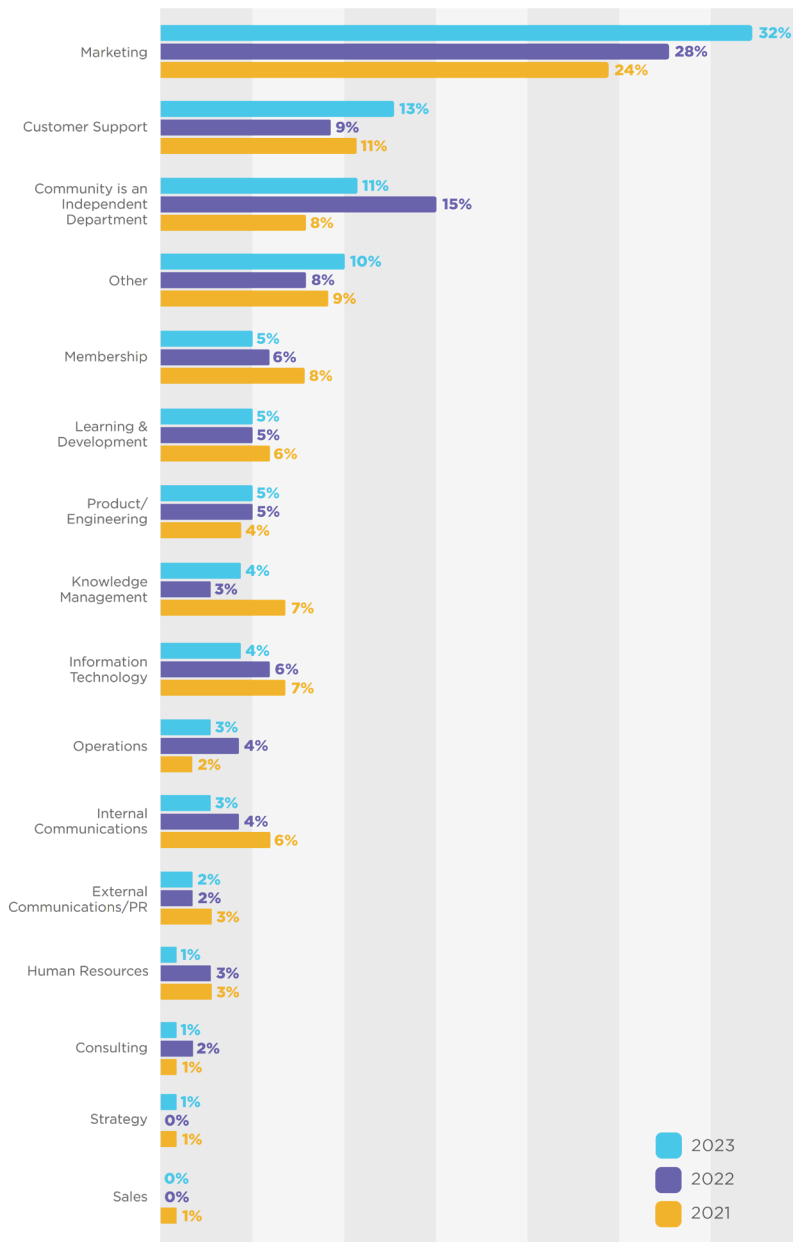
Number of Community Members

While the metrics around community sizes haven't shifted much from previous reports, we did see a larger percentage of communities with <1,000 members. Previously, only 20% of communities had smaller populations; this year, 37% of our respondents have <1,000 (24% at <500, 13% at 500-1,000).

Reporting Department for Community Program

Marketing and customer support continue to grow as the leading homes for community programs. This continued growth may be attributed to the clear use cases - and proven results - for community programs with marketing and customer service focuses.

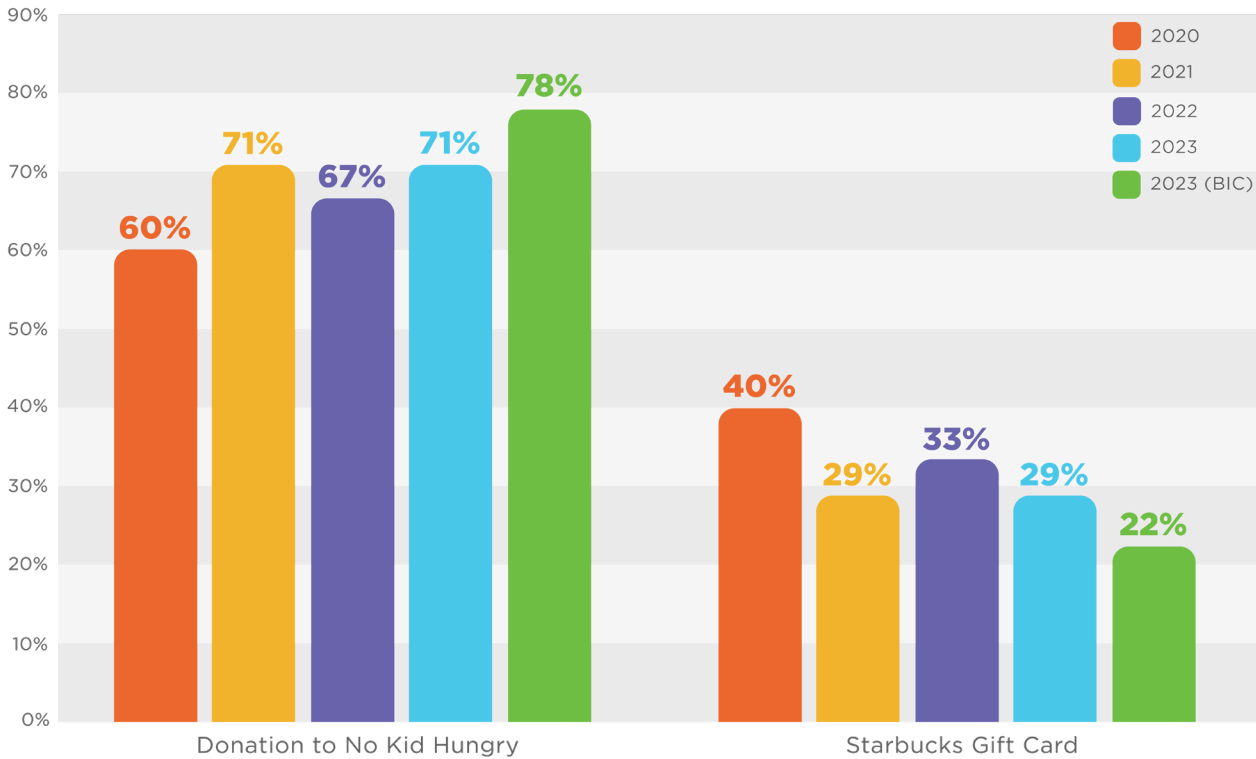
What Department is Primarily Responsible for Community Program Management?



Warm and Fuzzy Data Break

Every year we offer our respondents a choice of incentives - either a Starbucks gift card or the chance to make a donation to No Kid Hungry - an amazing organization focused on ending childhood hunger. We are delighted to write a bigger check each year due to the continued generosity of our survey takers.

As a Thank You for Completing the Survey,
Please Choose What Reward You Would Prefer:



What's in a name...

Best-in-Class

Soon after we published last year's edition of this research, clients and members of TheCR Network began asking us about an "advanced" or "best-in-class" segment so they could compare their programs to what we perceived as an exemplary community program. While we hadn't done that analysis for the main report, we were able to give them insights into what they could be working on to more closely resemble these programs.

As the survey results started rolling in this year, we knew we wanted to report on what we considered "best-in-class" and had some ideas of the attributes essential to be considered for that category. Our 2020 edition of this research relied on a respondent simply having a community with a strategy that was approved, operational, and measurable to be considered "advanced." This resulted in about 22% of that year's sample being considered advanced, which in hindsight seems too large.

For this year, we wanted a more exclusive group, with a more diverse set of advanced competencies baked into their community program. We included the communities with ALL of the following elements in the best-in-class segment for 2023:

- An approved community strategy
- An approved community roadmap
- A formal community leadership program exists
- Most community roles are defined
- Policies and guidelines both exist

2023 Best in Class Elements

- ✓ An approved **community strategy**
- ✓ An approved **community roadmap**
- ✓ A formal **community leadership program** exists
- ✓ Most **community roles** are defined
- ✓ **Policies and guidelines** both exist

The resulting segment is a mere 12% of the overall sample and we found evidence that they are leading the way all throughout this year's research. While they represent a wide range of industries, the "high tech/telecom/software" segment comprises a full 63% of the sample. Number of employees was evenly split between small (<500), medium (500-10k), and large (>10k), with 33% representing each segment. While they were evenly split between "a single community" and "a network of communities," the vast majority were focused on externally-facing use cases (93%). The age of the communities definitely skewed older, with 57% at least 10 years or older.

We hope you find the best-in-class insights throughout this research to be useful. We encourage you to provide feedback so that we can continue to refine this category going forward.

Report Overview

Online communities have come a long way in the last ten years. Initially seen as a “skunkworks” program, hidden away as an initiative within the marketing, customer support, or corporate communications department, community teams now often operate independently and serve myriad use cases in and outside the enterprise. With independence comes accountability, and we see many successful community programs rise to the challenge while others struggle to communicate their value. In considering both of these groups and what they need now, we arrived at three key findings.

KEY FINDINGS:

1. Create definition to level up your community program.

The best-in-class (BIC) segment of this year’s respondents help you create a roadmap to become best-in-class yourself. Putting pen to paper to write a community strategy that maps to business goals and then building a corresponding roadmap gives you clarity and helps sell your vision. Identifying and defining the roles you need to execute that roadmap helps you justify your resource needs. Establishing and operationalizing a community leadership program is essential to help you build communities at scale. Finally, defining your terms of service and community guidelines provides the necessary guardrails to ensure that contributions are positive and engagement is aligned with your goals.

2. Evangelism may be a hidden task, but it's also a secret weapon.

Ask any community manager and they'll admit that the task that they spend the most time on - but isn't in their job description - is evangelism. This can take on all sorts of shapes and sizes, but is often not formally planned, executed, or included in community strategies. BIC community teams use a mix of leadership programs, reports/dashboards, and a center of excellence to help spread the word about their community successes and the opportunities presented by embracing community approaches. They also engage with subject matter experts, progressive executives, and other business units with use cases tailor-made for community. As you read this report you'll likely see this evangelism "thread" woven throughout.

3. Times are hard, but it's not just communities that are tightening their belts.

Global uncertainty and economic turmoil cause organizations to curb spending and evaluate all "non-essential" projects. While it's easy to see all the people "open to work" in your LinkedIn feed, it's important to remember that you likely follow a disproportionate number of community professions given the work you do. We see enough data that community programs are still being funded, operating with dedicated budgets, and are increasingly able to prove the value of their communities... and best-in-class communities are even more so in each of these categories. This just makes it even more important for community builders to focus on the first two key findings in the coming year!

As the economic and community landscape continues to evolve, these insights, and the report that follows, provide valuable guidance for community builders to navigate the challenges and unlock the full potential of their online communities.

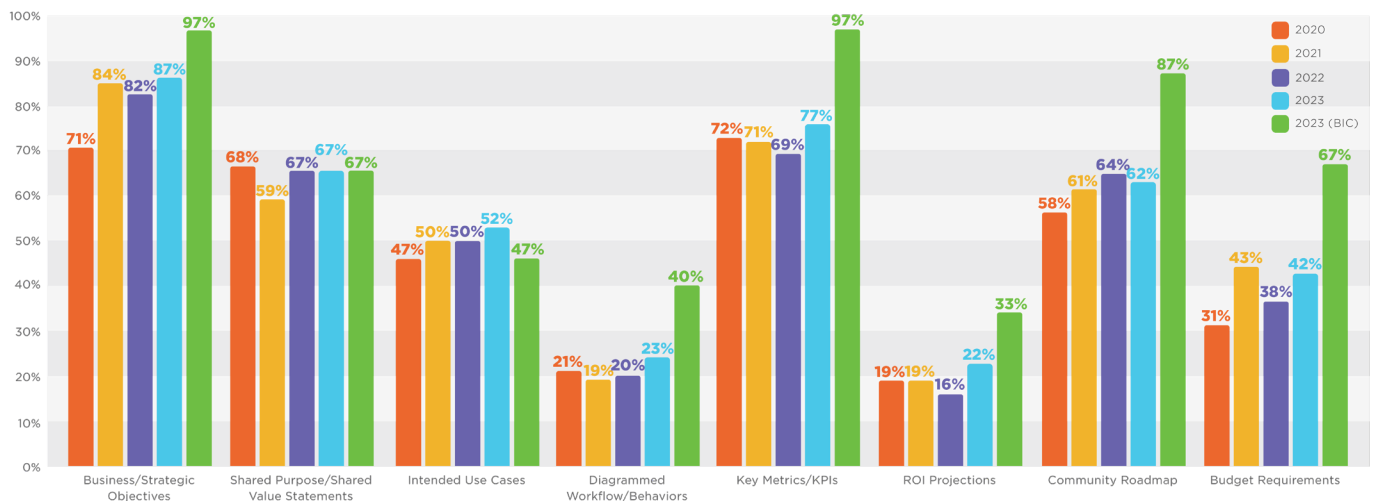


Strategy

The Community Maturity Model’s **Strategy** competency is an essential tool for evaluating the level of coherence and synergy between a business’s strategic goals and its community program. By assessing this alignment, organizations can ensure that their community initiatives are fully integrated into their overall strategy, resulting in powerful outcomes for both the community program and the business processes it supports.

We’ve tracked what we consider the key elements of an advanced community program strategy for the last four years, and we’ve seen increases across all elements over that time. Business/strategic objectives, shared purpose/shared value statement, and key metrics/KPIs continue to be the most widely adopted elements, with a community roadmap close behind. Not surprisingly, community programs in our best-in-class segment include all elements much more frequently than the survey average, with nearly all respondents indicating that they have business/strategic objectives and key metrics/KPIs in their plan. Compare and contrast your program with the best-in-class segment and consider leveling up by including one or two new elements in 2023.

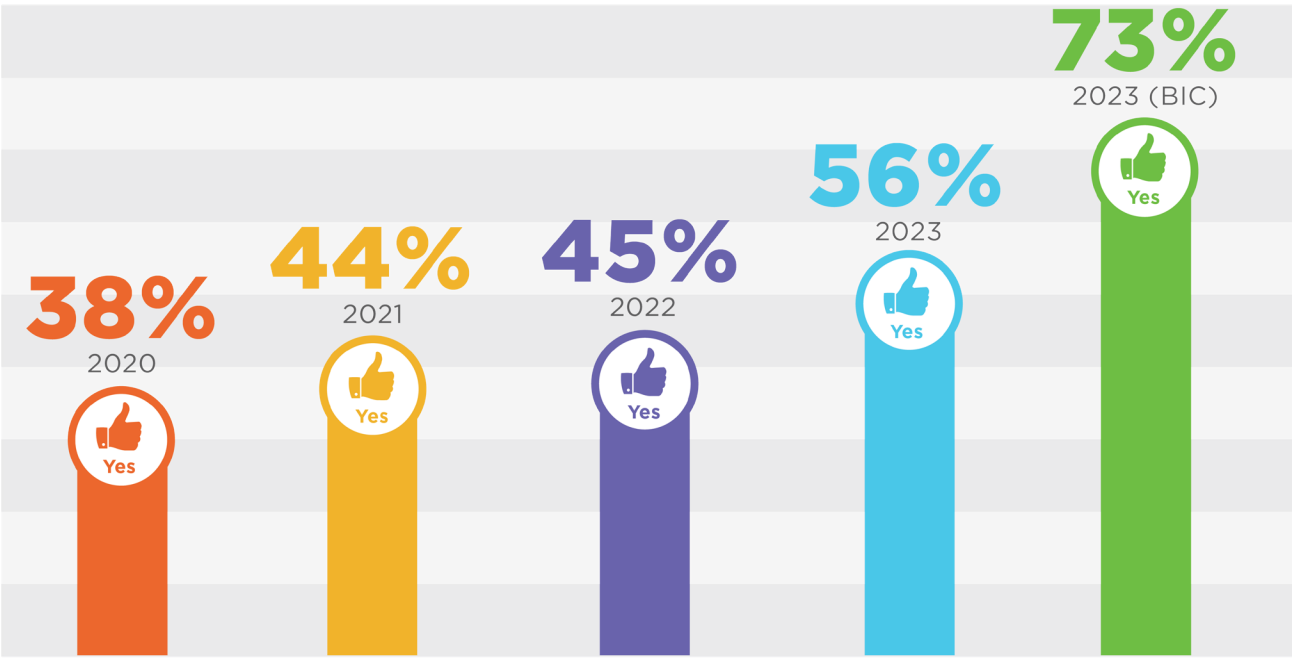
What Elements Are Included in Your Community Strategy?



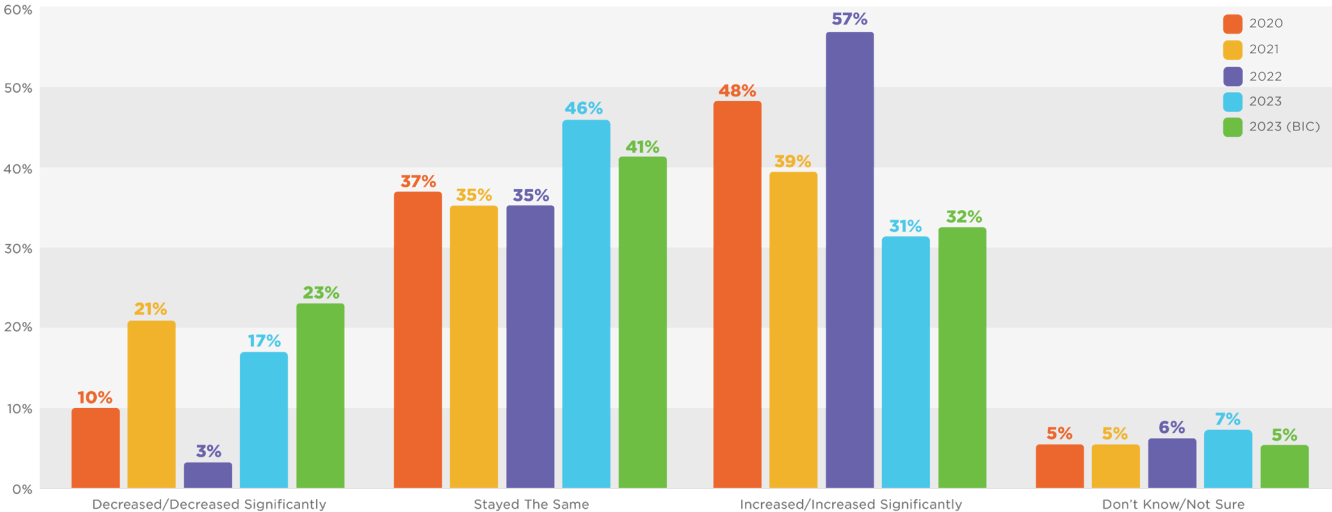
Dedicated community budgets are becoming the norm, but community programs are not immune to the current economic climate. Respondents to this year’s survey report decreasing budgets, in line with other departments. Interestingly, best-in-class communities are not immune to

cost-cutting programs and actually saw greater budget cuts than the survey average. Continuing to explore new use cases for community within your organization and ensuring you are aligned with business objectives is a good approach to weather the current economic environment.

Does Your Community Program Have Its Own Dedicated Budget?



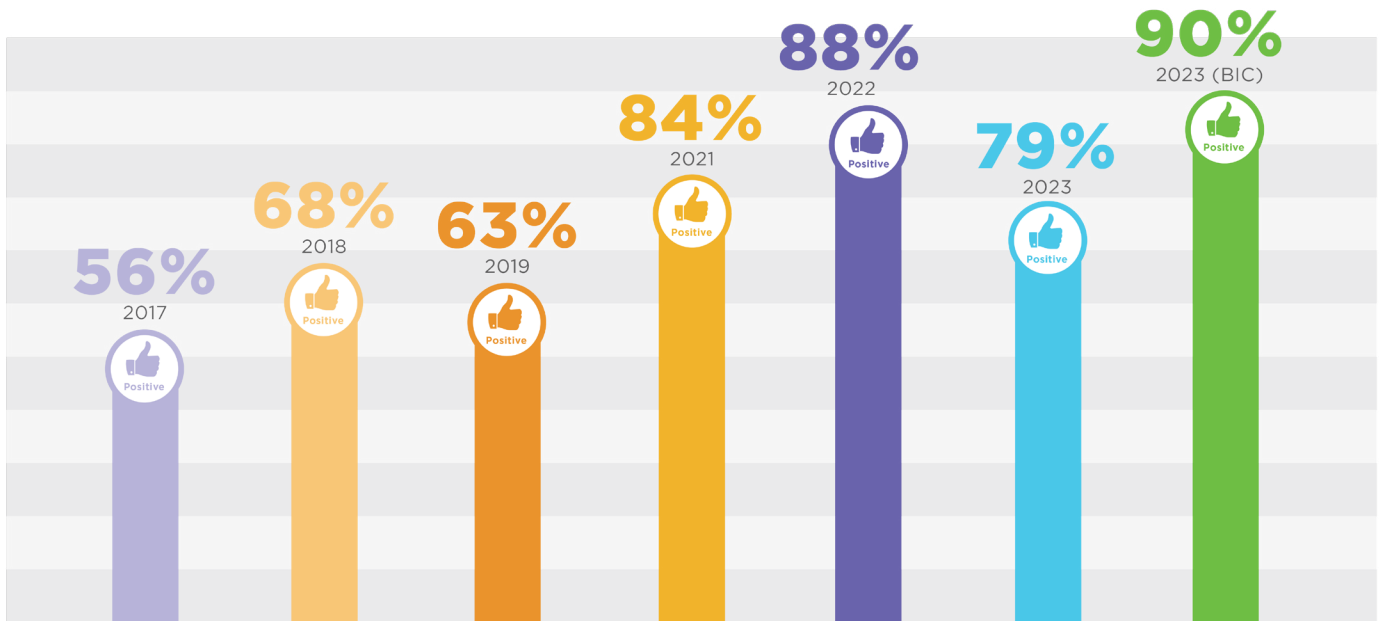
Compared to the Previous Year, My Community Budget Has...



Good news... Executive perceptions of community programs are still overwhelmingly positive! Not so great news...they are down slightly from last year's peak.

Best-in-class communities outpaced even 2022 numbers, with 90% reporting positive/very positive executive perceptions. Is this a broad trend or sample anomaly? We can't be sure, but make sure you and your executive champion (you have one, right?) continue to share community program progress and successes to stay top-of-mind with the c-suite.

What is Your Executive Perception of Community?



NOTE: No data for this question was collected in 2020.

Recommendations

Double down on internal evangelism.

Keeping the attention (and enthusiasm) of executives takes a coordinated effort. Enlist your champions across the business to ensure executives continue to support the community program and help middle management see the value in community approaches.

Expand your community strategy to include new use cases.

Successful community programs leverage early enthusiasm to deputize new champions and grow their mandate. “Land and expand” is a tried and true sales technique that you can leverage in your community expansion plans.

Weather the storm.

While economic uncertainty may impact your community team/program, it is important to keep your community strategy aligned with shifting organizational priorities. Be prepared to pivot if necessary.



THREE THOUGHTS ON THE STATE OF COMMUNITY STRATEGY FROM

Becky Scott

Head of Community, JumpCloud

“By recycling from our strategy documents we can answer questions across the organization - this is what we do, this is how we can help you, and this is why community is important.”

Becky’s perspective on the state of community strategy

On connecting the dots...

“The biggest question for me is not just do you have your strategy, but are you tying it back to the business? There are a lot of community people who still don’t know how to do that. You shouldn’t stop at “this is what community does.” Okay, but how does that tie back to the business and what your company is doing? Why should your executives care? Your executives are always wondering what’s in it for them so tie it all together - back to KPIs, OKRs, and organizational goals.”

On talking the language of business...

“You have to be able to speak the language of your organization, and always come back to that value proposition. But it has to be the language of the business. As much as I love to talk about relationships and building connections with people, your executives don’t want to hear that. Show them the value in language they

understand: if you’re a support community are you deflecting cases or support costs? If you’re a marketing community are you helping with the top of the funnel?”

On recycling your strategy documents...

Becky stresses that your community strategy is the foundation of all your community conversations. “I have one big strategy deck that has everything you could think of in it and I pull strategically from that. It makes it so easy to go talk to support or product or even external folks, and have all those common questions answered: what the community is, what it does, what our objectives are. By recycling from our strategy documents we can answer questions across the organization—this is what we do, this is how we can help you, and this is why community is important.



Leadership

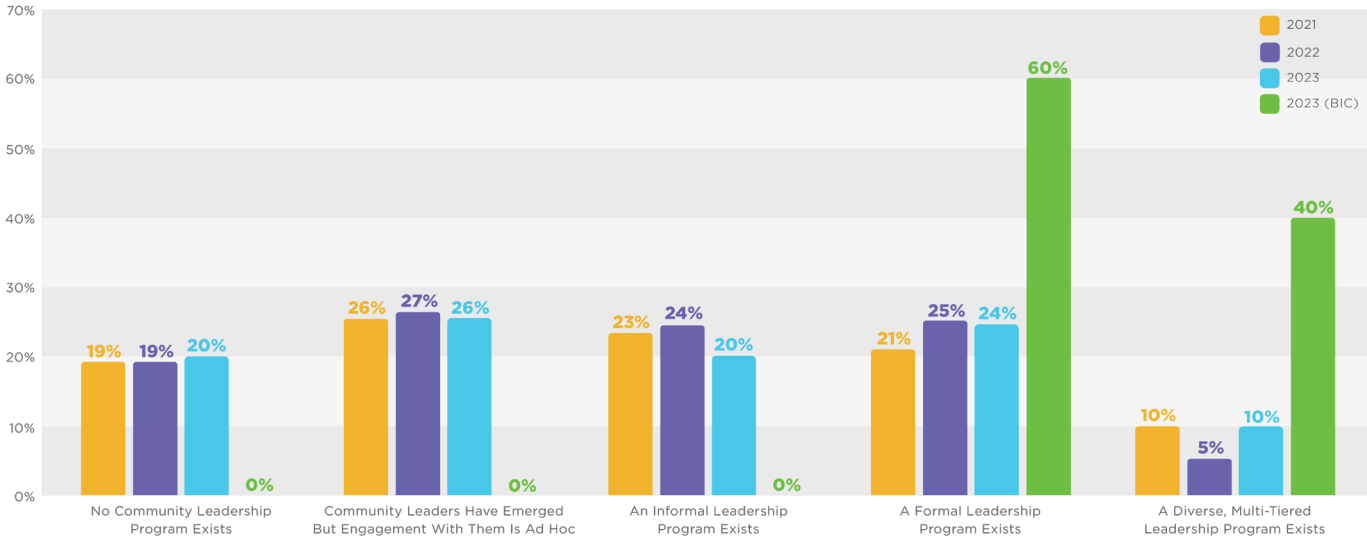
The **Leadership** competency of the Community Maturity Model™ involves executive sponsorship, active participation in community programs, emergent leadership, and a deep understanding of the broader organizational ecosystem.

Leadership development programs (AKA advocacy, MVP, champion, or superuser programs) are essential for building thriving communities as they contribute to increased engagement, the ability to measure value, and stronger executive participation.

Formal leadership programs empower community members to hone their skills and develop a collaborative, innovative, and continuously improving culture, which is fundamental to the long-term success of a community.

Investing in leadership development programs is a strategic priority for organizations seeking to foster vibrant and sustainable communities. In doing so, organizations unlock the potential of their community members, driving value and nurturing a sense of ownership and commitment towards achieving shared goals.

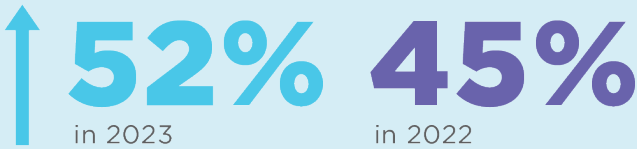
What Best Describes Your Community Leadership Program?



Community leadership programs continue to lead the way and are an indicator of advanced community programs. While the overall share of community programs with at least an informal community program remained consistent with 2021 and 2022, we saw the percentage of respondents with the most sophisticated program double, returning to 2021 levels.

In 2022, we declared leadership programs were in the critical path of becoming a best-in-class community program. This year we put our money where our mouth is and included having at least a formal leadership program in the best-in-class segment we cite throughout the report. The difference between this segment and the survey average is striking.

SME Involved in Leadership Programs



We saw a modest uptick in subject matter expert (SME) involvement in community leadership programs (52% vs 45%), perhaps a result of our recommendation in the 2022 research. If you are not yet engaging SMEs in your leadership program please consider making 2023 the year you start.

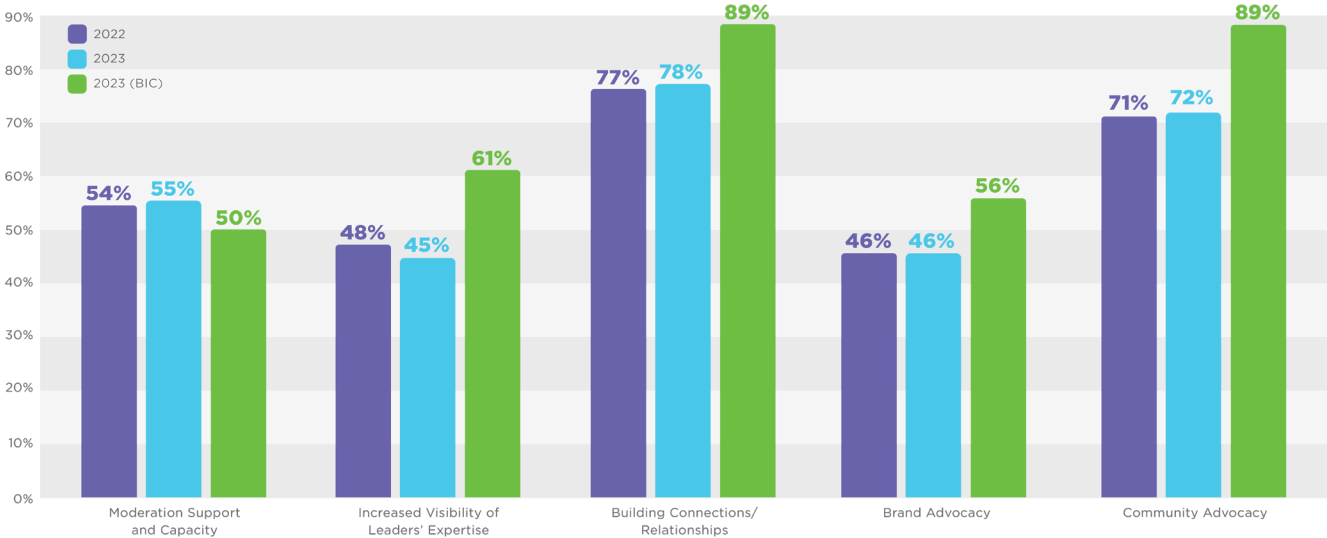
The purpose of community leadership programs showed little change from 2022 to 2023, but this is where best-in-class programs begin to differentiate themselves, showing significant emphasis on leadership programs focused in the following areas:

- Moderation support and capacity
- Increased visibility of leaders' expertise

- Building connections/relationships
- Brand advocacy
- Community advocacy

These elements clearly illustrate how shared purpose creates shared value and we again want to shine a light on the importance of community leadership programs in overall community success.

What is the Purpose of Your Community Leadership Program?*

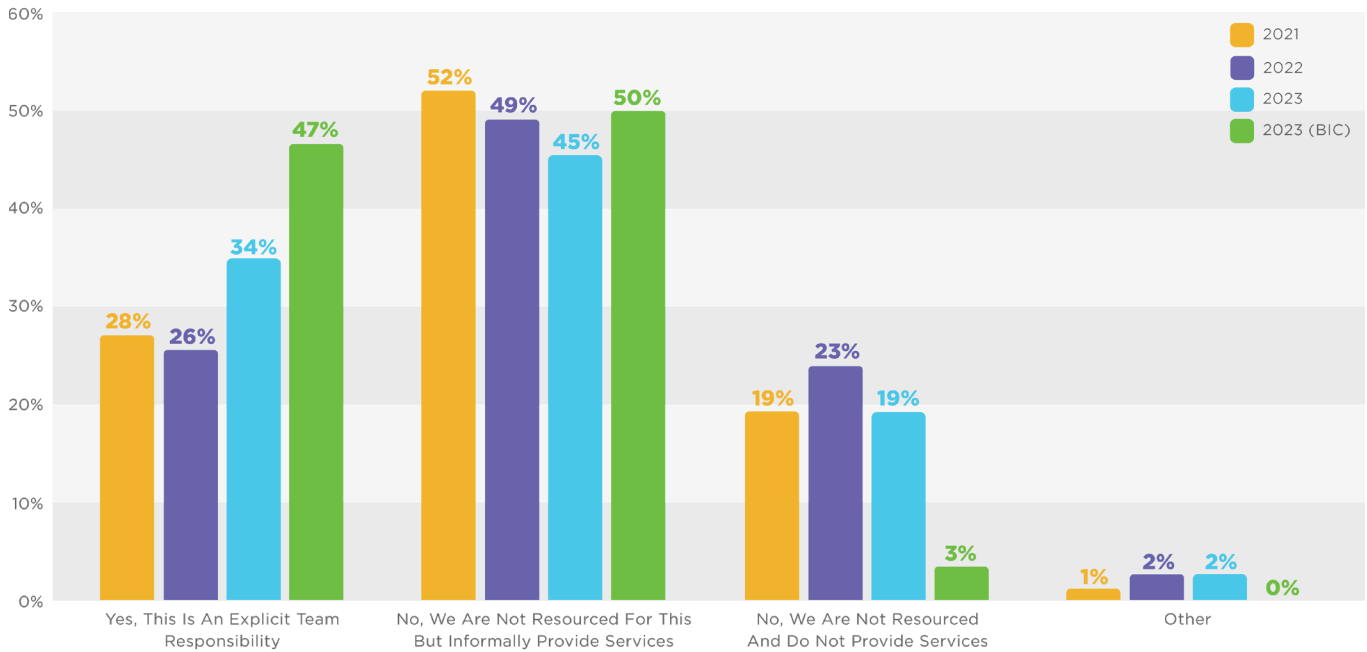


* Participants were encouraged to select all that applied to their programs

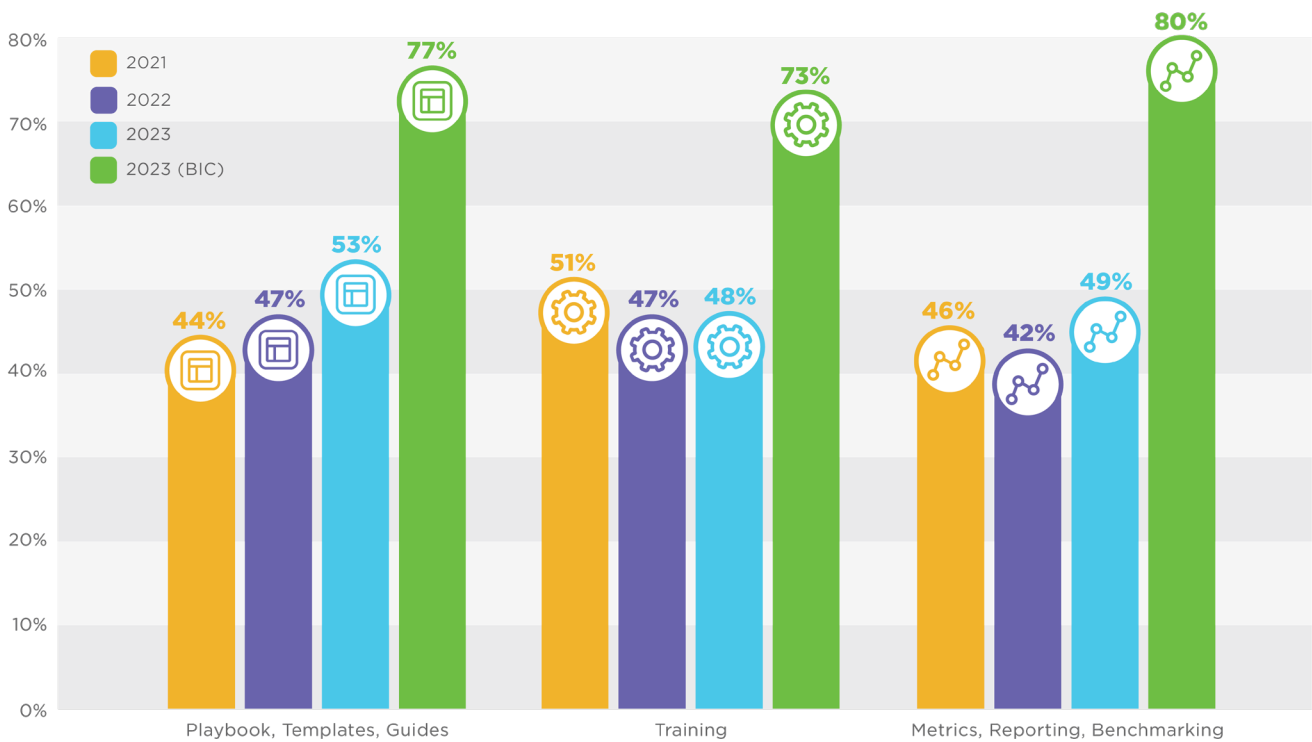
Community teams are increasingly relied on to enable community approaches throughout the organization and in best-in-class communities this is nearly always the case (97% of respondents), although most of them are not specifically resourced to provide these resources. This is challenging - and can be a source of frustration for small teams - but they can be effective with scalable solutions.

Most respondents to this year's survey maintain playbooks, templates, and guides for fledgling community initiatives. Other prominent services they provide are training and metrics, reporting, and benchmarks. Executives and sponsors reading this report should understand this isn't sustainable in the long term... and the long term begins now! Community approaches can provide organizations with tremendous value, but they require investment to capture that return and this is a critical area that allows your program to scale.

Is the Community Team Explicitly Tasked and Resourced to Provide These Enablement Services?



Prominent Services Provided by Community Teams to Other Parts of the Organization



Recommendations

Level up community leadership.

In 2022, we recommended you “start” a community leadership program and we are asking you to double down in 2023. Embrace the importance of diversifying your community team, including experts and passionate constituents from both inside and outside your organization.

Nurture your ecosystem with scalable services.

The garden analogy is a good one for community and is apt here. A playbook is an organic document (tool) to support people interested in applying community approaches to their work. Templates and training are the water that helps them grow, and reports and benchmarks are essential to show them where they need to prune, and which efforts are bearing fruit.

Embrace a broader purpose for your community leadership program.

Most community builders see leadership programs as effective ways to scale moderation, advocacy, and build connections, but best-in-class communities extend their programs to shine a light on their leaders’ expertise, improve brand sentiment, and provide opportunities for mentorship, embracing shared purpose to create shared value.



THREE THOUGHTS ON THE STATE OF COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP FROM

Lisa Allison

Director of Community and Digital Support, Analog Devices, Inc

“There’s a direct correlation between member empathy, and growing leadership programs.”

Lisa’s perspective on the state of community leadership

On the limits of small teams...

“There’s a direct correlation between member empathy, and growing leadership programs. It’s so difficult when you’re just one person, when you’re a solo practitioner, to get in there and to really engage with the members one-on-one because you’re trying to keep the lights on. For many years [as a team of one] I really wanted to start a leadership program, but couldn’t implement it until I knew that I could stick with it. What I don’t want to do is roll out a super user program and then have to drop it.”

On branding opportunities...

“A huge part of leadership programs is to help build connections and relationships. I was a little surprised when I saw how many people are using leadership programs for [brand advocacy](#) because I have always said that a community is a great way to highlight your brand, but it can fall on

deaf ears if your organization still doesn’t see the true value community brings to brand advocacy. I was happy to see that this number went up, and that other people are using their community leadership programs for brand advocacy.”

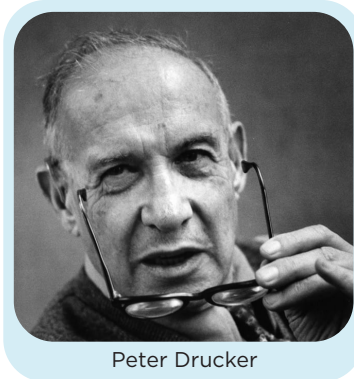
On broadening the scope of training...

If you’re struggling with the training piece, consider deputizing leaders in the community to train their peers. “If they have trained other users in the community, are volunteer forum managers, or even moderating a small section of the community, ask them if they’d be willing to train new members. And train them to train others!” By dispersing training responsibilities to super users, and then down through members, you can reach a wider audience and benefit from the added layer of trust in peer-to-peer learning.



Culture

The Community Maturity Model's™ **Culture** competency pertains to various aspects of an organization or community's habits, motivators (intrinsic and extrinsic), social norms, communication, decision-making processes, development processes, and learning approaches. By recognizing and anticipating cultural obstacles and embracing change, organizations can effectively manage risks and successfully establish their community program.



Peter Drucker

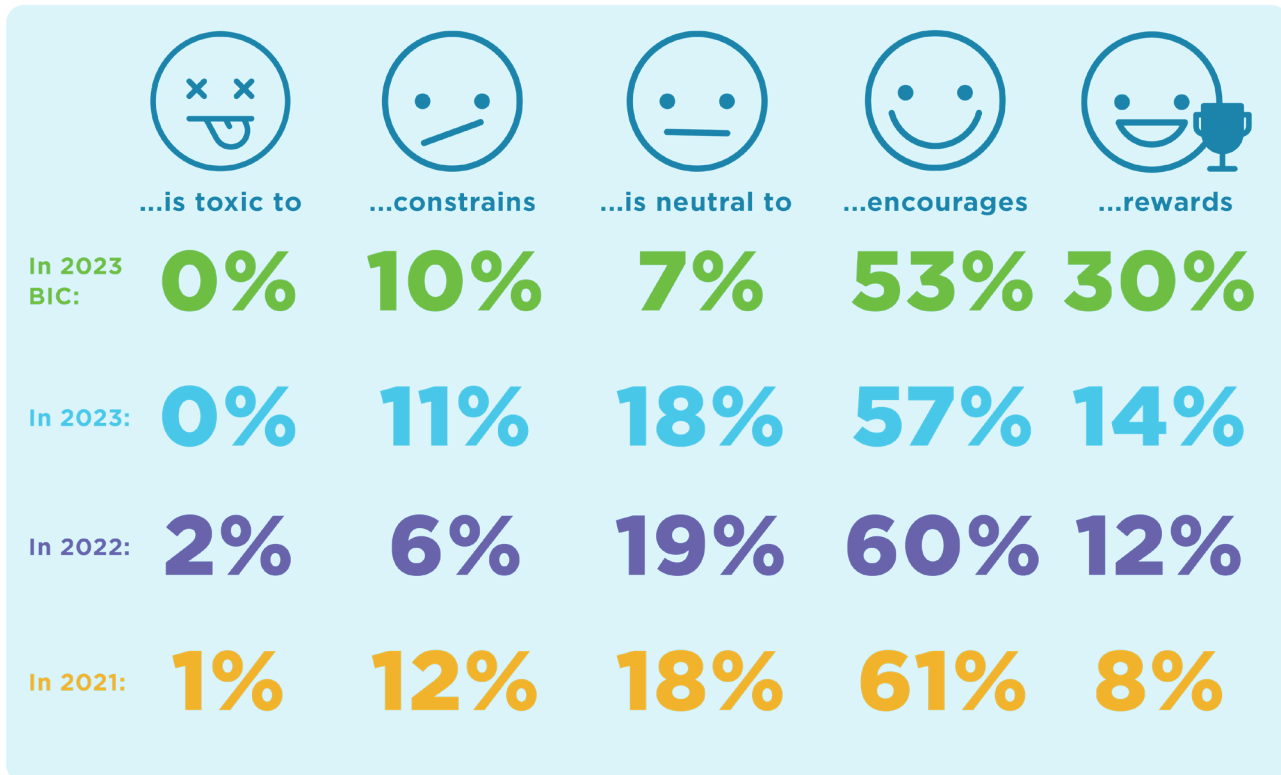
Legendary management guru Peter Drucker famously said, “culture eats strategy for breakfast” and while he didn't mean to minimize the importance of a good strategy, he firmly believed a strong culture could be a surer route to organizational success. The same is true with community programs, which is why we're interested in how they're viewed within organizations.

For the first time in this research's history, no respondents reported that their organization's culture “is toxic to” community.

We see this as a promising trend and at the other end of the spectrum notice that best-in-class programs see their organizations “reward” community approaches at more than twice the rate of the survey average. Perhaps ironically, we see this as even more evidence that you need to push your program to adopt more advanced strategies in order to influence what your organization's culture values and supports.



My Organization's Culture _____ Community Approaches

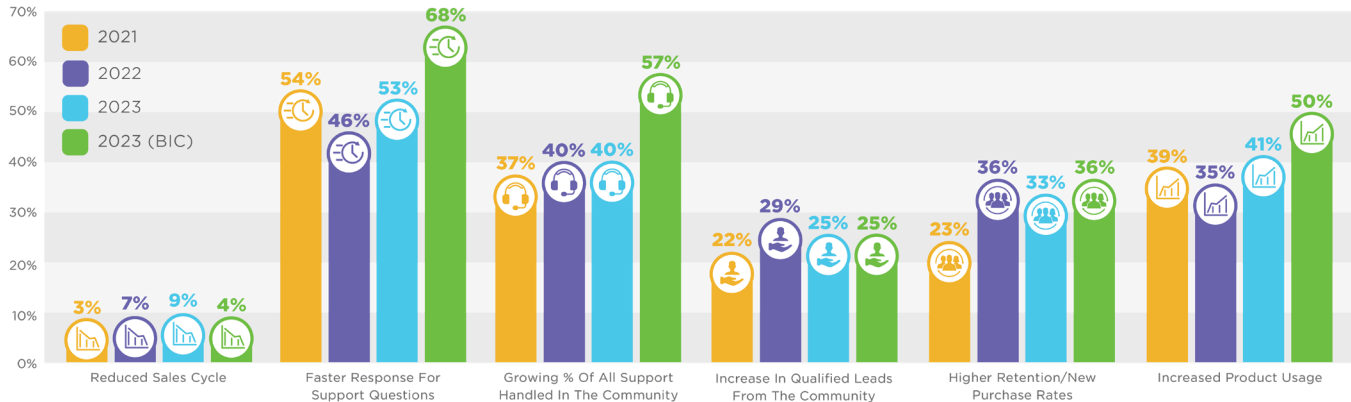


Communities are behavior change-makers. When you give people a faster, easier, or more effective way to do something, they typically adopt this new approach. External-facing communities continue to grow across nearly all behaviors we index and best-in-class communities show dramatic improvement in three areas:

- Faster response to support questions
- Growing % of support handled in the community
- Increased product usage



What Behavior and Culture Change Can You Directly Attribute to the Community (External Factors)

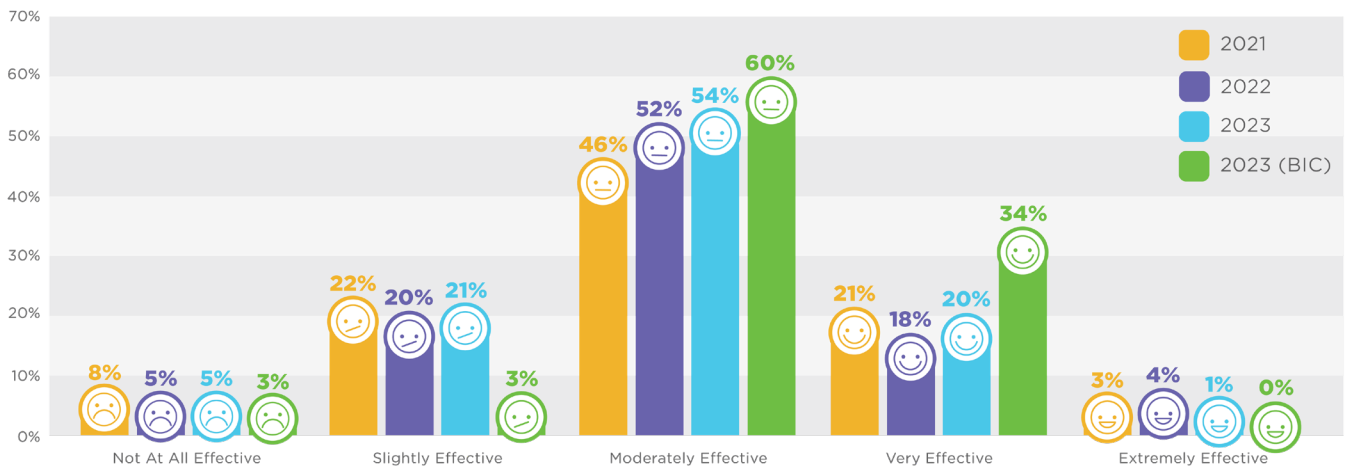


External communities also continue to report that they “reduce the sales cycle” at an accelerating rate, but it’s still a relatively small percentage of the overall sample, so we hesitate to give it too much weight just yet.

Not surprisingly, 75% of respondents report that their communities are at least “moderately

effective” at facilitating behavior or culture change, consistent with the 2022 sample (74%). This is uplifting news, but compare those figures with this years best-in-class sample (94%) and you might be inspired to conduct a gap analysis to figure out what you need to level-up your community program..

How Effective is Your Community or Network in Facilitating Behavior or Culture Change?





Recommendations

□ Ride the wave.

Acknowledge the idiosyncrasies of your corporate culture and lean into those aspects that will help community approaches be successful. Not all cultures are all-in on community, but by focusing on the aspects that are supportive you're more likely to achieve success.

□ Build consensus with small wins.

When you identify people that are embracing new approaches, encourage them to help you share throughout the organization and/or with other people in the community. Ask them to focus on recognizing small changes that are moving behaviors in the right direction. As the Chinese proverb says, "A journey of a thousand miles begins with one step."

□ Blow your horn!

It's not enough to grow a successful community initiative by staying within a division or group. Get out there, talking about how the community is supporting other business units with their goals. Identify community cheerleaders (and skeptics) across the organization and answer their questions to bring them along for the ride.



THREE THOUGHTS ON THE STATE OF COMMUNITY CULTURE FROM

Ashleigh Brookshaw, M.A.

Founder & CINO, C2m Digital, LLC

“If there are aspects that are measured either through a sentiment survey or functionality, make sure that they’re highlighting cultural elements, and have a mechanism to gather that feedback.”

Ashleigh’s perspective on the state of community culture

On focusing on the positive...

“Through many conversations with community managers, I’ve realized that sometimes we get focused on the bad things within an organizational culture and kind of get stuck on that. It’s really important to highlight the positive, and find those elements that you can use - and are also measurable. If there are aspects that are measured either through a sentiment survey or functionality, make sure that they’re highlighting cultural elements, and have a mechanism to gather that feedback.”

On community and change management...

“One of the main things that is difficult for many community professionals is continuously reinforcing the business value of community. [This is where] having the organizational structure, policies, and procedures to affect that culture change long-term, enables those business conversations with the appropriate stakeholders. You have to be able to articulate what is the business value of community in terms that they understand: impacting the bottom line, etc.”

On disrupting “tap on the shoulder culture”...

Community is a great place to enact meaningful culture change. Ashleigh shared an example from her career, “There was a lot of what I’ll call “dissent” among marginalized groups within the community, on seeing the same types of speakers at the annual conference. It’s always the same people, that organizational culture was what I would call a ‘tap on the shoulder culture’, they kept tapping the same people over and over to show up in different spaces. So in the community, I saw some conversation, “Why do you guys always have the same speakers?” I took that to the professional development team and showed them, “There is a gap that’s being discussed via the members, let’s address that and then circle back to them.” It was a very real world, tangible way to use community to kind of disrupt that ‘tap-on-the-shoulder’ culture that had been there all along. This led to a holistic DEIB strategic discussion, and resulted in the organization acting meaningfully and highlighting opportunities across all channels not just through cliques.”



Community Management

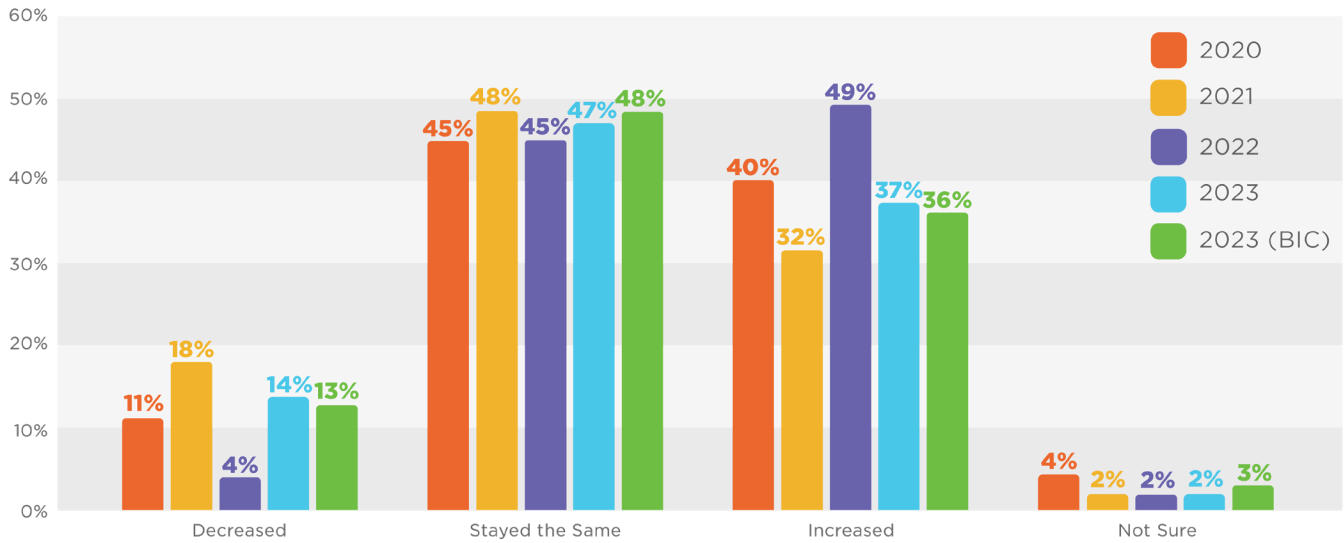
The Community Maturity Model's™ **Community Management** competency is an all-encompassing discipline that plays a vital role in ensuring the productivity and success of communities. Regardless of their unique backgrounds and individual approaches, community managers share a fundamental goal: to establish thriving and engaged communities in which members can effectively learn from each other and collaborate on ideas, issues, and challenges. As experts in their field, community managers possess the necessary skills and knowledge to build and maintain these communities, while leveraging their expertise to promote a culture of growth and innovation.

In 2022 we saw community teams grow to meet the increased demand for communities as companies embraced virtual and hybrid work environments. We expected this would continue into 2023, but a land war in Europe and a slowdown of the economy has introduced a lot of uncertainty and organizations are limiting their spending.

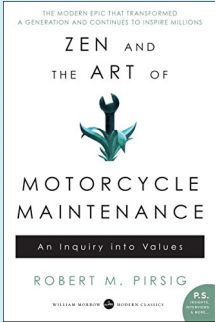
Community teams were not immune to the economic slowdown and staffing cuts, with a significant uptick in the number of respondents indicating the size of their community management staff has decreased and a similar drop in the number of people indicating their team size has increased. Even best-in-class communities were impacted in a similar way, indicating to us that this is an issue that's systemic and not specifically tied to community initiatives. While it's not time to sound the alarm yet, we do encourage you to follow our guidance to become a best-in-class community program as we expect this will make you more immune to negative staffing consequences.



Compared with the Previous Year, Community Management Staff at my Organization Has...



In “Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance” author Robert Pirsig suggests that “if you can’t define something you have no rational way of knowing that it exists.” We encourage you to take this to heart and strive to provide definition wherever possible in your community program. A good place to start is defining the roles on the community team. If you’re an overachiever, get them approved by human resources (HR).

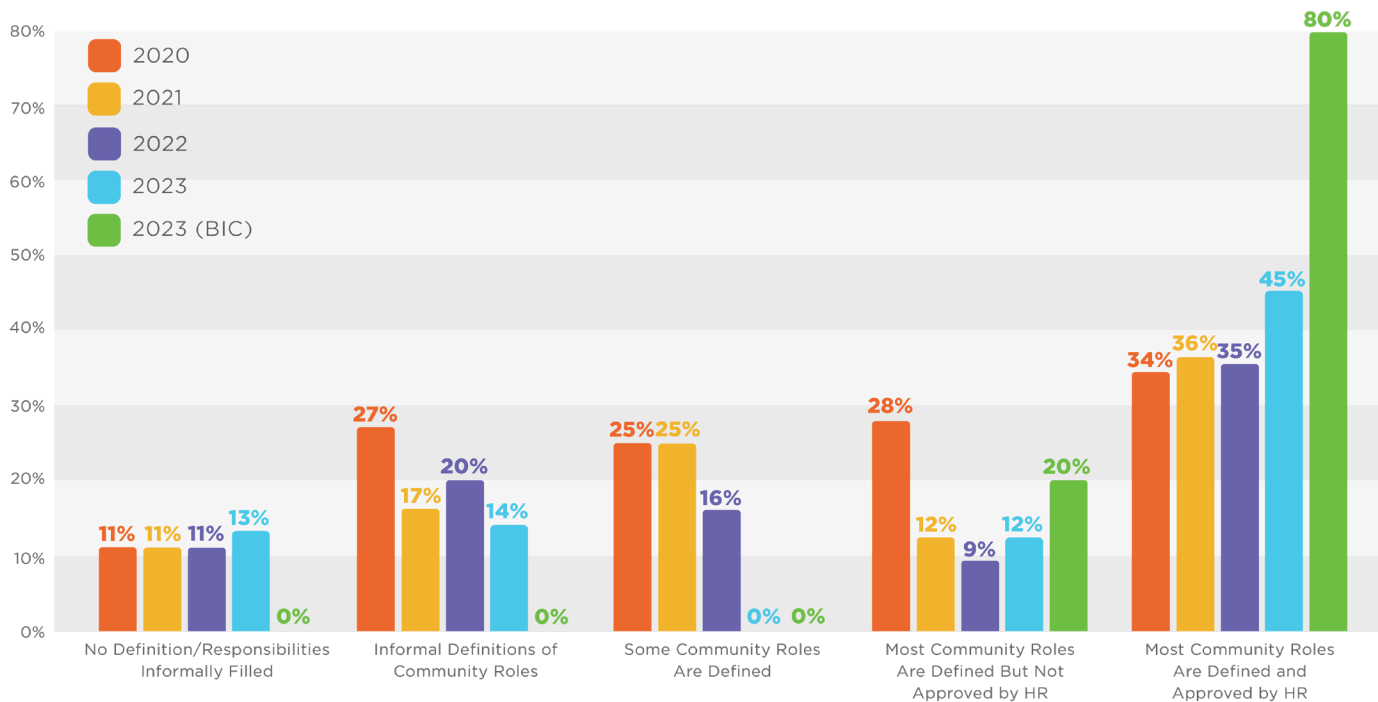


“If you can’t define something you have no rational way of knowing that it exists.”

We were stunned to see that in this year’s best-in-class sample a full 80% of respondents have defined most community roles AND approved them with HR, while 43% of the overall sample have only defined “some roles,” informally defined roles, or have no roles defined at all. The path to normalizing and operationalizing your community program is with definition and there’s no better place to start than with your team roles.



How Are Community Staff Roles Defined By Your Organization?



Even with properly defined roles there are challenges in building a community program. This year’s respondents were consistent with prior years in some areas and reported interesting changes in others.

“Not enough resources” continues to be a top concern (25%), even for best-in-class programs (27%). This may be because more and more teams are being asked to provide services to other areas of the organization (see [Leadership](#)). It takes time (and resources) to build out these services in a scalable way. Alternatively, many organizations are trying to “do more with less” and this may just be a common response regardless of the business area.

“Best-in-class communities are FOUR TIMES more likely to report ‘no challenges’ than the survey average.”



“Measured by the wrong metrics” saw a dramatic increase in this year’s overall responses (25% vs 5% in 2021 and 2022). Contrast this with our best-in-class sample (3%) and we’re left to wonder if communities without a clear, approved strategy are unable to articulate how they should be measured? More evidence that building toward a best-in-class program is in every community program’s best interests.

Another interesting response is “lack of executive understanding” which was reported at a similar rate as in past years (11% vs. 8% in 2021 and 9% in 2022), BUT barely registered with the best-in-class sample (3%). If you’re beginning to hear a steady drumbeat, we have one more data point for you.

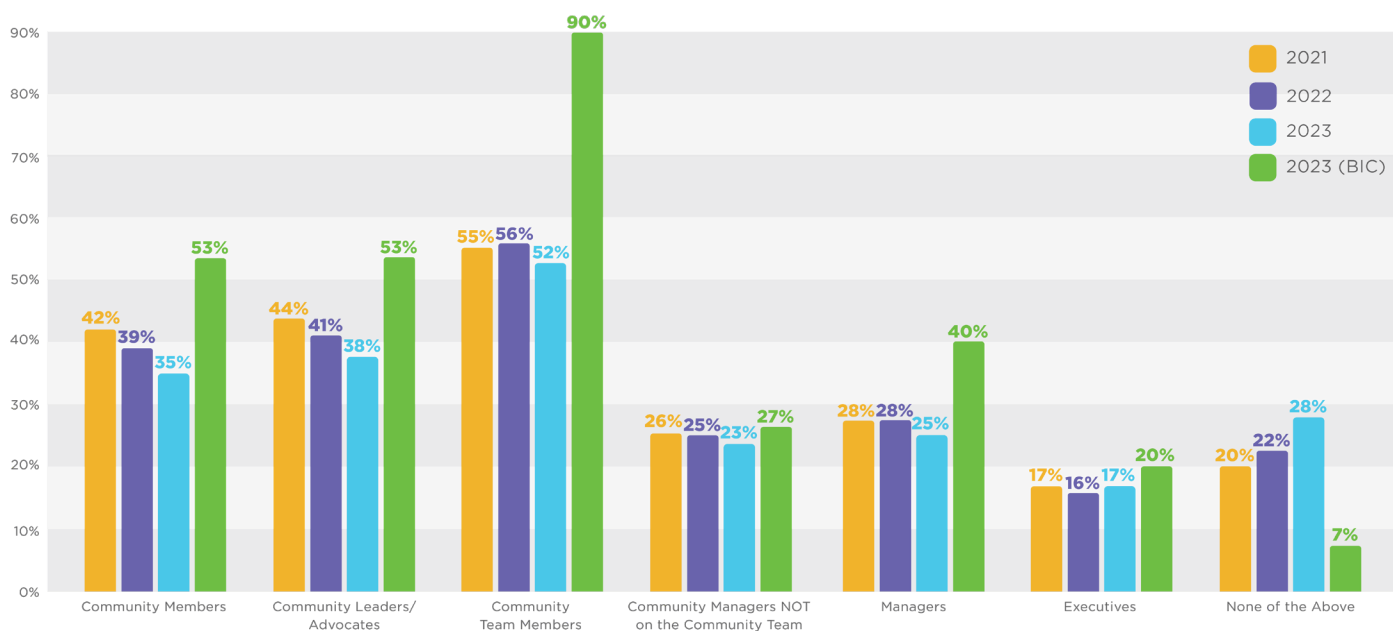
When we were finalizing the survey this year we realized that previous versions didn’t include the option for respondents to select “no challenges” and we thought this might result in an interesting finding. Sometimes this report could write itself

and this is one of those cases. Best-in-class communities are FOUR TIMES more likely to report “no challenges” than the survey average.

Getting up to speed on community management best practices and staying abreast of new trends and approaches is critical to keeping your community program (and team) engaged and evolving. Best-in-class programs provide community training to a broad range of organizational roles more often than the survey average. But the rate at which they provide training, often through a year round resource like [TheCR Network](#), is clearly a difference maker (90% vs 52% for the survey average).

Internal evangelism is an often hidden item on a community manager’s to-do list and leveraging training resources from The Community Roundtable (or others) is a great way to bring constituents up to speed and speaking the language of community without occupying too much of your time.

Who in Your Organization is Offered Community Training?





Recommendations

Define community roles.

Focus on the “who-what-why” on your community team to better justify the team you need. WHO do you need? WHAT are they going to do? WHY is this role essential? The closer the roles on your team are aligned to your community strategy and roadmap, the more likely that they’ll become a funded resource. [The Community Careers and Compensation Report](#) is a good companion/resource to help you build this out.

Never stop evangelizing.

Look for (and take) any opportunity to get out from behind your computer and talk with people inside your organization about the community program. This can be hard with the rise of remote work, but be creative and tell your story far and wide. You can never have enough allies who can speak your language and share how the community helps them do their job more efficiently and effectively.

Expand community training.

Leverage third parties to scale community training and offer it to anyone that needs it. We recommend a baseline community training program as part of an effective community request process, ensuring you build and launch communities for constituents who have a plan and are fully resourced to launch and successfully grow the community.



THREE THOUGHTS ON THE STATE OF COMMUNITY MANAGEMENT FROM

Kyle Pitocchelli

Principal, Vantage

“Double down on the relationship part of community. Community can extend across the organization in ways that you sometimes can’t even imagine.”

Kyle’s perspective on the state of community management

On thinking like an executive...

“If you are resource constrained, try to put yourself in the headspace of the leaders of your business. What outcomes are they looking for? Start to build those relationships cross-functionally, to understand what different people have influence, and who might be interested in community-oriented solutions. Understanding what types of community-oriented solutions are possible helps pave the way for future wins.”

On building relationships...

“Double down on the relationship part of community. Community can extend across the organization in ways that you sometimes can’t even imagine. Consider at the surface level, and you can extend it to a product, you can extend it to marketing, to sales, to partner management, etc. The more relationships you build across the organization, the greater the understanding

of how to create that common value. Not only are you winning new opportunities, but you’re building strong relationships with people who can help support you, and they’ll advocate for you when you need resources.”

On being an influencer...

“As a community manager, you really require a high degree of influence across your organization, because community just touches so many areas of the business. Creating relationships and influencing others needs to be a priority. Sometimes that involves politics, and that’s not always fun for a lot of folks, particularly if you’re more introverted, it can be quite the task. But it’s absolutely imperative if you want to create an “organization within the organization” that is influential enough to perform the great work that needs to be done and you’re capable of achieving.”

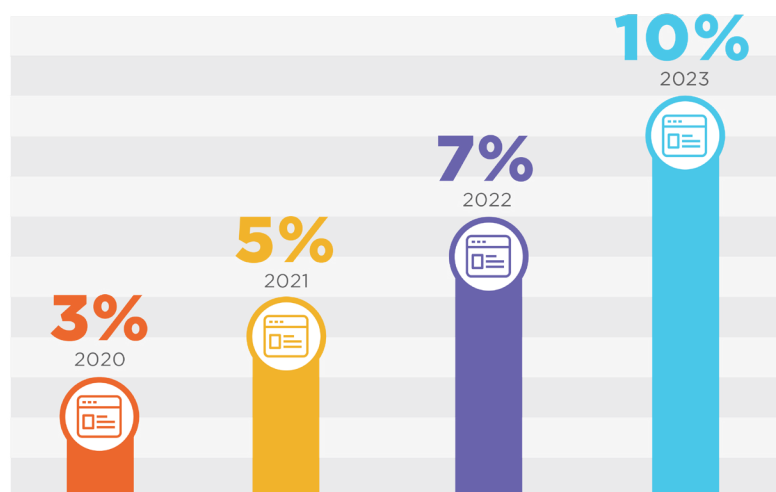


Content & Programs

The Community Maturity Model's™ **Content & Programs** competency concerns the twin foundational pillars of any thriving community program: content and programs. These are the essential components that attract and retain members. High-quality content is critical to create interest and engagement among members. Programs facilitate connections and foster deeper relationships between members. Together, they are the driving force that keeps a community active and successful.

Experienced community managers know that creating and curating compelling content is critical to the success of any community. Likewise, creating opportunities via programs for members to come together to share and learn together is an essential part of their work. This year's respondents report an increase in their budget allocated to content and programs, more than tripling since 2020 (from 3% to 10%).

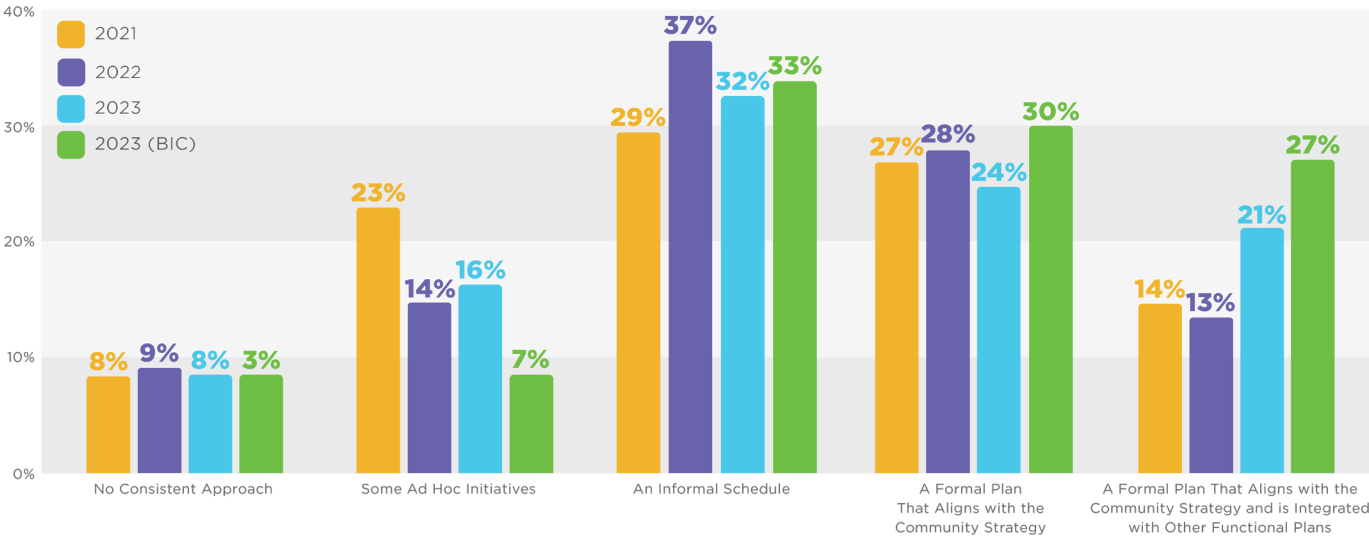
Percentage of Budget Allocated to Content and Programs



We also noticed a general maturation of content and program planning in this year’s sample, with 21% of respondents indicating that they have a formal plan that aligns with community strategy

and is integrated with other functional plans, up from 13% in 2022. This is a big jump and given the importance of content and programs in overall community engagement, a welcome one.

What Best Describes Your Community’s Approach to Content and Programs?

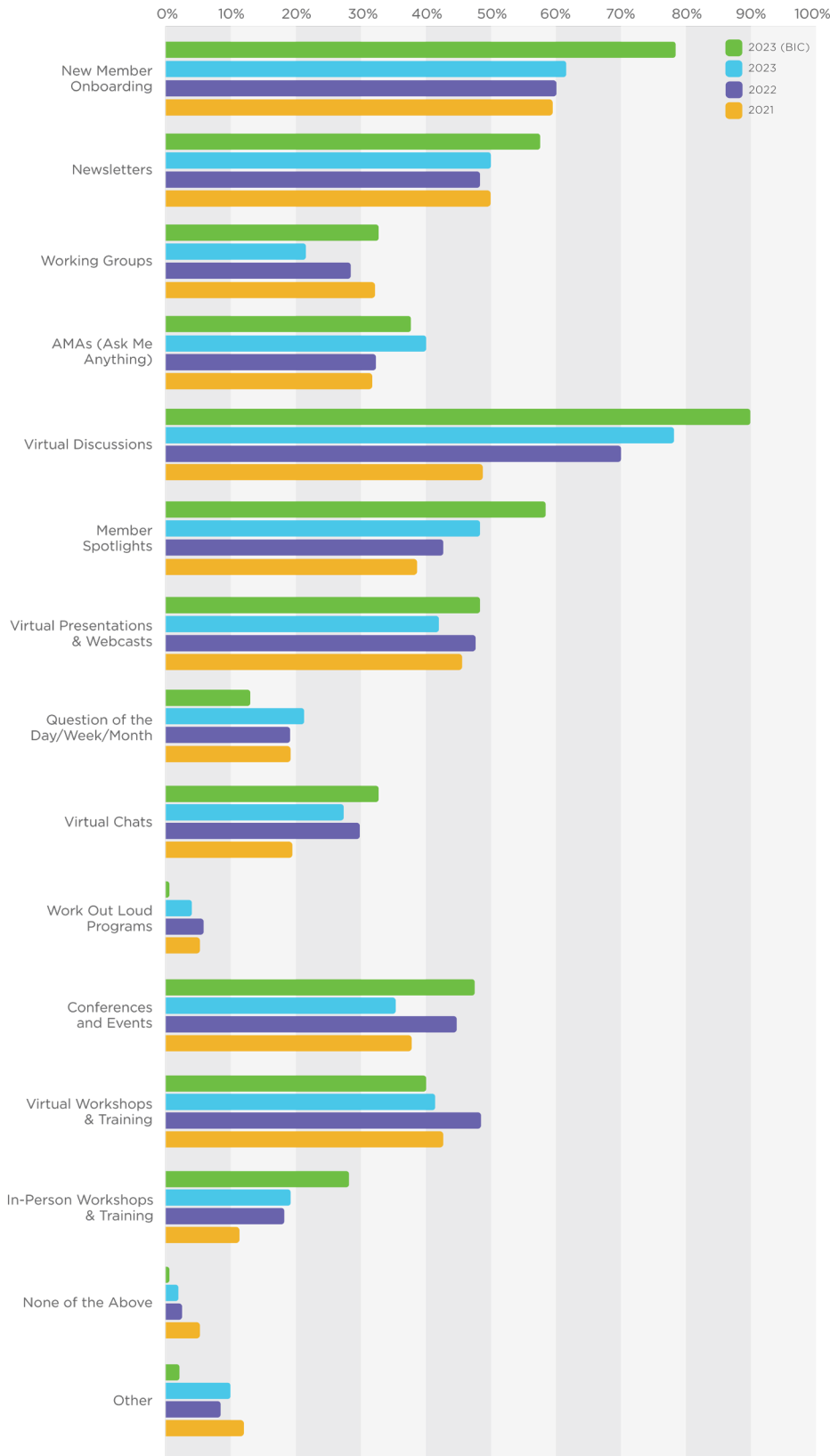


Understanding the importance of content and programs and allocating your budget appropriately is a positive step, but where you allocate that money is where it’s interesting to compare our survey average against the best-in-class segment. Not surprisingly, both segments report “virtual discussions” are the leading program with 77% of the survey average and 90% of the best-in-class segment leveraging them. “New member welcome/onboarding” programs are also widely employed (62% vs 77%), as well as “member spotlights” (48% vs 57%). “Conference and events” also sneak onto the list, reinforcing that getting your community members together in person remains a focus in this post-COVID era.

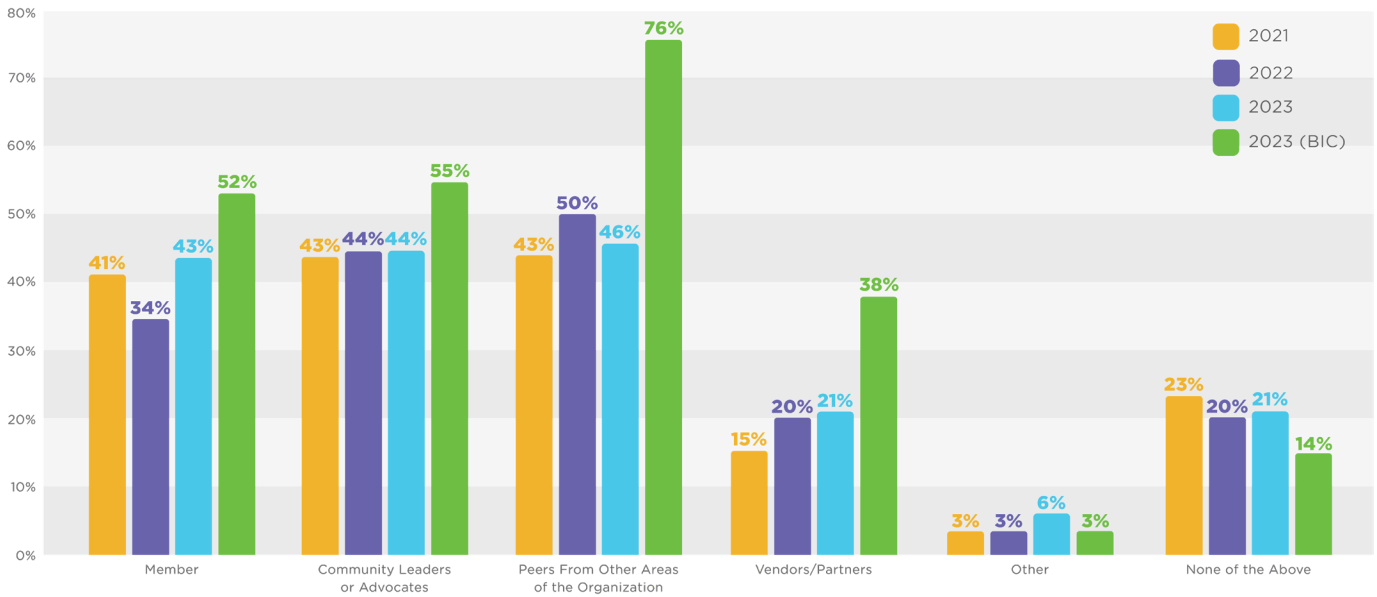
Best-in-class programs, with their formal leadership programs, remind us to look outside your community team to create compelling programs. While the 2023 survey average generally tracks with previous years, the best-in-class segment draws in contributors from both in and outside the organization. It’s most striking with “peers from other areas of the organization,” where 76% of the best-in-class segment is pulling from (vs just 46% of the survey average). It’s worthwhile to audit how diverse your community program plan is and add in new voices on a regular basis to keep it from getting stale.



What Type of Programs Does The Community Team Produce For The Community?



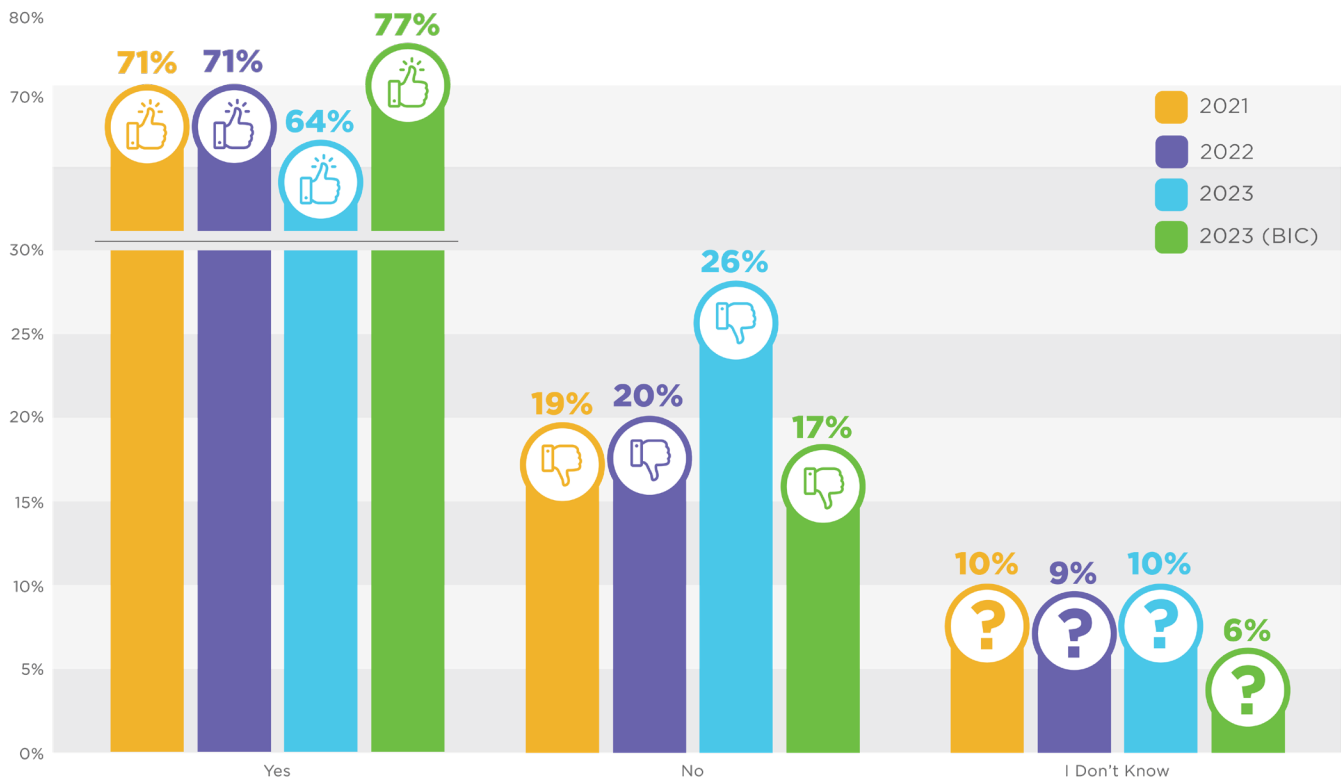
What Groups, Other Than The Community Team, Produce or Facilitate Community Programs?



Finally, last year we (strongly) suggested that if you don't currently have programs focused on new members it should be on your short list. To the 36% of respondents in this year's survey that still don't do this or don't know if you do, please

find out. If you're not welcoming new members with information on how they can get the most out of the community, make it a priority in 2023. We may sound like a broken record, but it's essential to your success.

Is Information About the Community Included in Customer Onboarding?





Recommendations

Tie it all together.

Aligning your content and program planning to your community strategy and overall organizational goals illustrates that you're a thoughtful operator that understands how your efforts move the needle in other areas.

Share the load.

Don't try to do it all on your own. While it might seem easier to keep all the programs to yourself, the more you share the ownership and execution with other community constituents, the more engaged your community will become.

Diversify.

Look at the different community programs you're creating on a regular basis and rotate in some new ones. Whether it's a monthly member spotlight or a periodic working group meeting, your members will appreciate new opportunities to connect with one another.



THREE THOUGHTS ON THE STATE OF CONTENT & PROGRAMS FROM

Bri Leever

Community Strategist, Ember

“ We often think about onboarding as a leftover experience, but it’s actually a big indicator that your members are going to be long term participants in your community. ”

Bri’s perspective on the state of content & programs

On onboarding...

“If you’re ever experiencing a lack of engagement, the two places I go immediately are your onboarding experience and your leadership development funnel. We often think about onboarding as a leftover experience, but it’s actually a big indicator for if your members are going to be long term participants in your community.”

On connecting members...

“As a Community Manager, we are constantly looking for bridges between members. It’s not your job to answer every single question. Your job is more like that of an air-traffic controller - signaling and prompting members in areas of compatibility, interest, and connection.”

On sharing the load...

Bri echoed the idea that no community manager should be creating all the content and programs for their community. “Share the load! Sharing the load with your team internally, and activating your community members to take the lead on content and programs inside the community. With a good structure in place, community members can contribute content and own programs themselves.”



Policies & Governance

The Community Maturity Model's™ **Policies and Governance** competency explores the essential components that underpin the stability and long-term success of any community. While content and programs serve as the lifeblood of a community, policies and governance act as the guardrails, ensuring the community operates within ethical and legal parameters.

Policies are the guidelines that dictate how members of the community interact with one another. This includes terms of service, which outline the legal management of the community, and guidelines that clearly articulate the expected behaviors and their underlying rationale. These policies provide structure and stability, allowing community members to understand their rights and responsibilities.

Governance refers to the structure of the community team, how it operates within the organization, and how it facilitates community-related activities across the organization. Effective governance is essential for maintaining the integrity and sustainability of the community, ensuring that it remains aligned with the organization's mission and values. By providing leadership and direction, governance helps the community stay focused and achieve its goals, while mitigating the risks associated with community management.

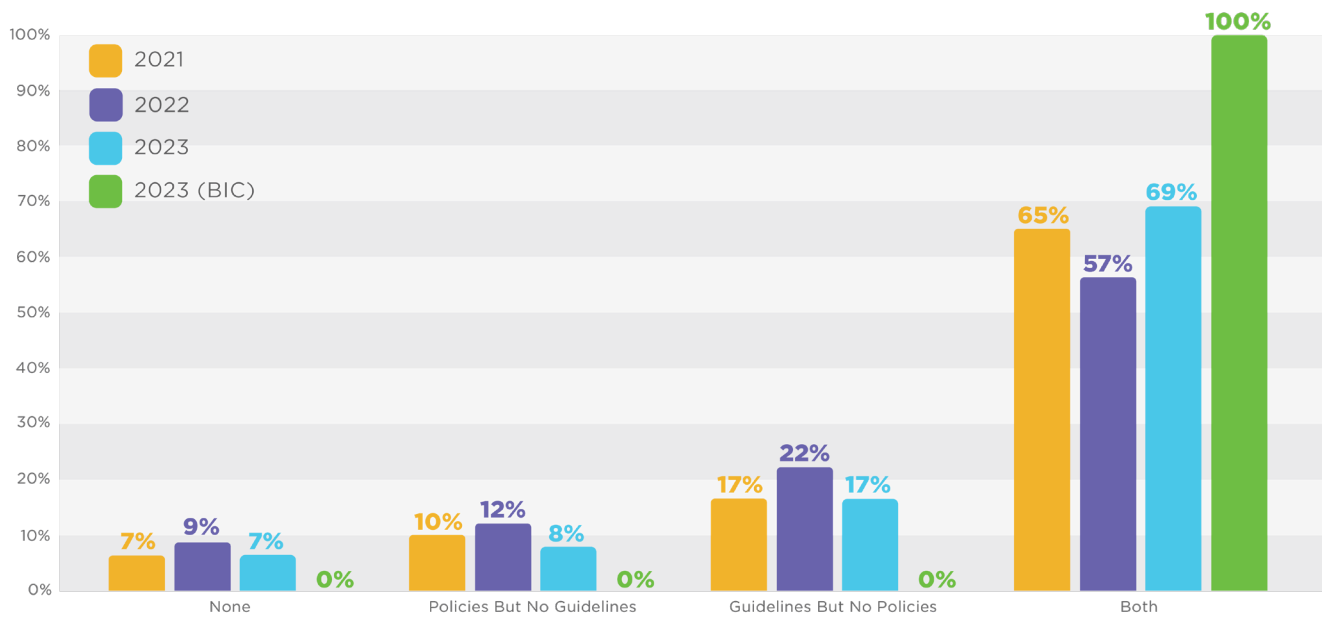
*Policies are “**how we kick you out**” of the community and guidelines are “**why we kick you out**” of the community.*

- Melissa Westervelt, Cambridge Associates



Last year we implored you to take the time to get both policies and guidelines in place and many of you listened (69% vs 57% in 2022). This still leaves 31% of you with work to do, and we encourage you to make 2023 the year that you get it done. Solid policies and governance plans are so important that we included having both in place part of the best-in-class criteria.

What Best Describes the Policies and Guidelines Governing Your Community?



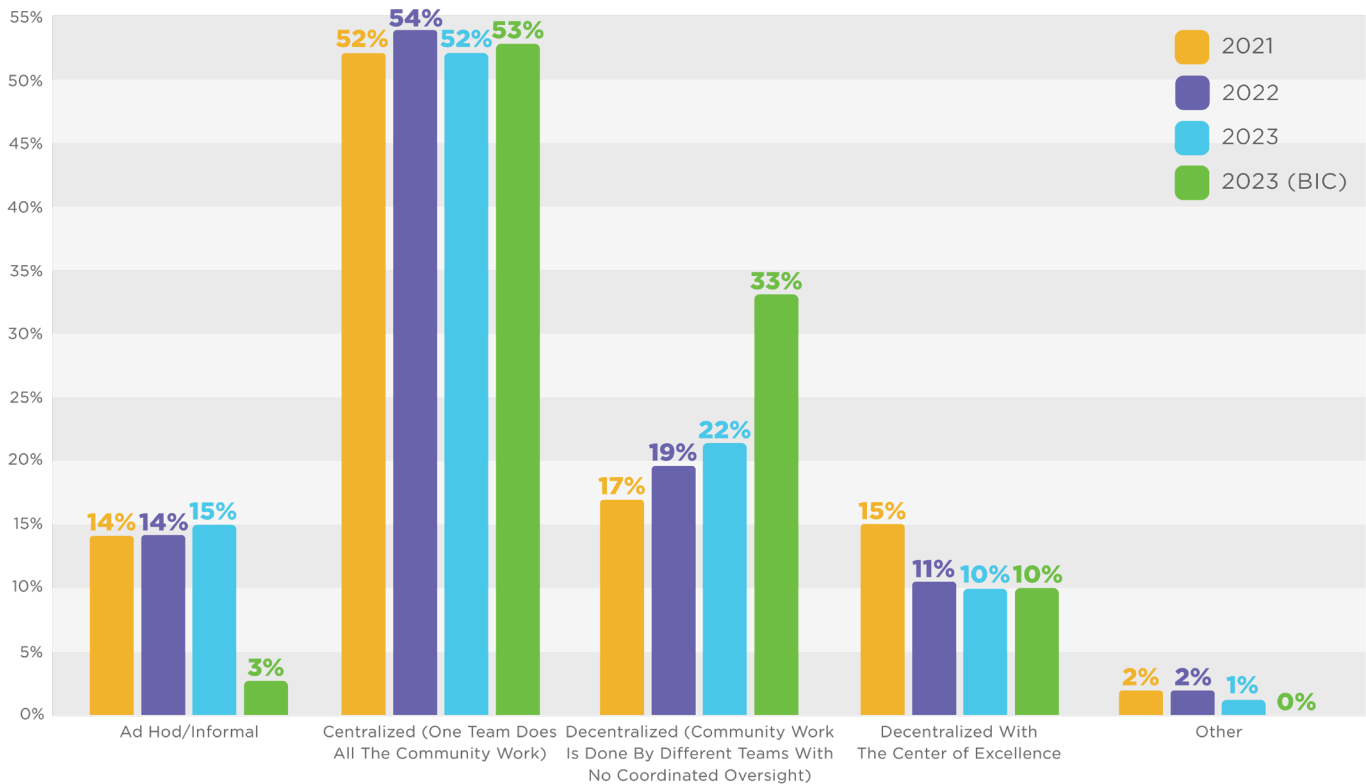
We were surprised to see Community Centers of Excellence (COE) decrease in popularity in both the overall and best-in-class segments. Even when we isolated respondents who manage a “network of communities” they are more likely “decentralized (community work is done by different teams)” (30%) vs “decentralized with a COE” (13%). Centers of Excellence, while the name may seem daunting, do not need to be an all-compassing, full-baked solution on day one. In fact, we recommend starting small and growing over time as it’s much more sustainable for small (and hopefully growing) community teams.



An early COE may include just some definitions and next steps for someone interested in learning more. How does the organization view communities? What are common use cases? Who can someone speak with if they'd like to explore building a community?

As time allows, you can begin to collect this information in an initial version of a community playbook and then layer in more resources over time. These might include community training, a new community approval process, regular knowledge sharing for community managers, templates, and more. We think you'll be surprised how far you can go in a year or two and how much a COE will help you both scale AND help you govern a growing community ecosystem.

How Is Community Work Governed Within Your Organization?



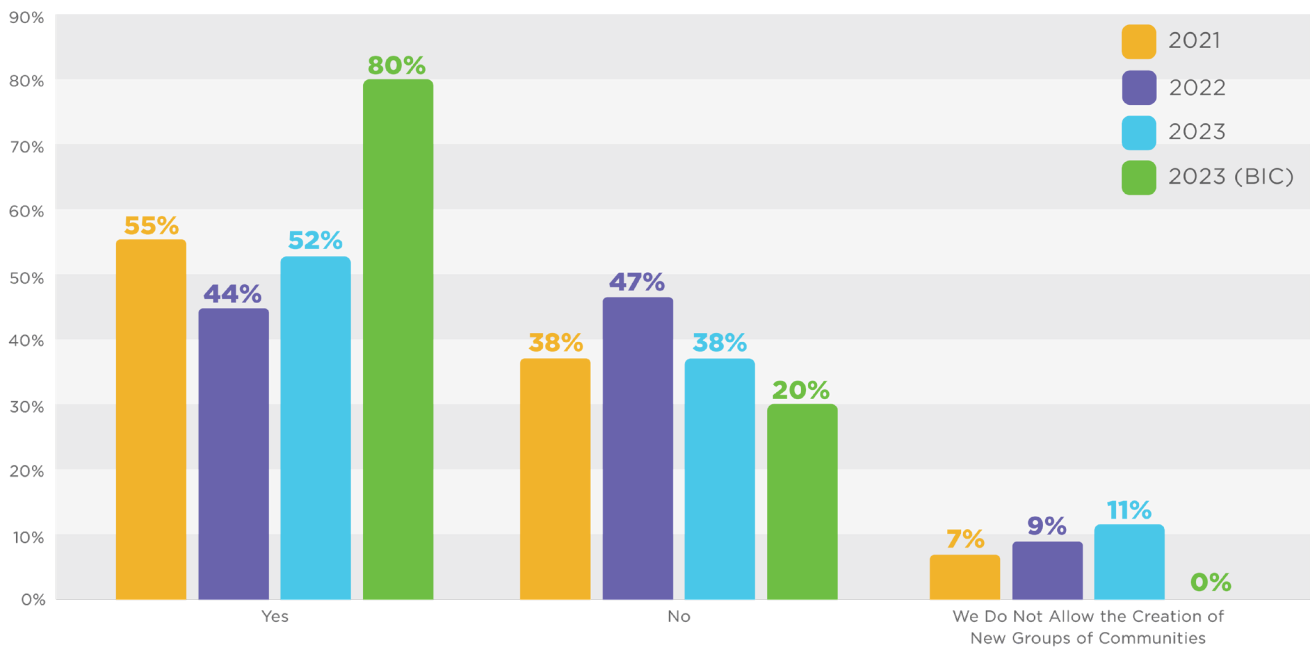


There was a modest increase in the number of respondents reporting that they have an approval process in place for new communities (52% vs 44% in 2022). More dramatic are the best-in-class responses, with 80% indicating they approve new communities. While it may seem like a trivial issue, having an approval process in place can help weed out the “build it and they will come” community

projects, which occupy your precious time, likely fail, and become something you need to explain in your next 1:1 with the executive team. Even a rudimentary approval process is a great idea.

See the resources in [TheCR Network](#) or the [Policies & Governance Resource Bundle](#) for templates and ideas.

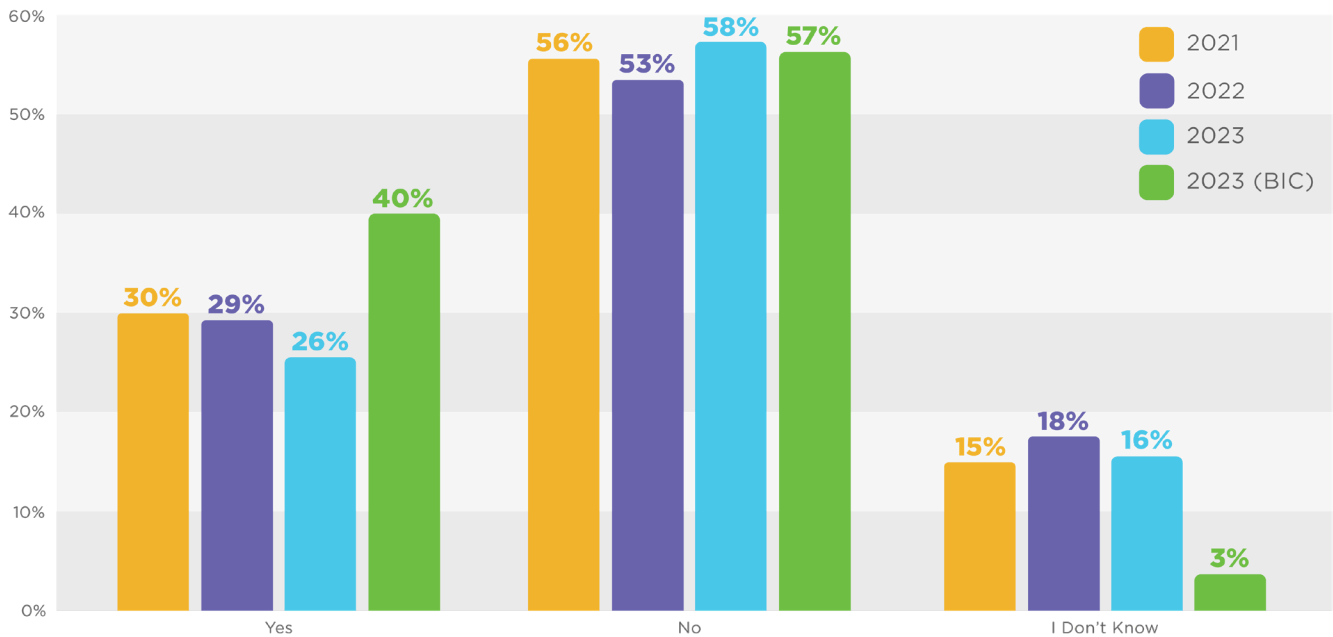
Do You Have a Defined Approval Process for the Establishment of New Groups and/or Communities?





When we talked earlier about “sharing the load” in the [Content & Programs](#) section we encouraged you to deputize people outside the community team to help create content and facilitate programs. As you do that it’s critical that you create alignment between what they’re tasked to do and your community’s engagement. Setting performance goals for employees that are contributing to the community helps to keep them energized long after the initial buzz of the community wears off. Best-in-class communities are doing this at a much higher rate than the general survey population (40% vs 26%) and we encourage you all to strive for best-in-class status going forward.

Is Community Engagement a Performance Goal for Employees Who Are in Functions Outside of the Community Team?





Recommendations

Just do it!

Ask your peers for examples of their policies and guidelines, edit them, and make them your own. This is an easy one. Let's see if we can get to 100% of respondents in 2024!

Build it and they will come.

Not a community, but a Center of Excellence for people in your organization that are community-curious. It doesn't need to be the Taj Mahal... start small, but just get started.

Good fences make good communities.

Creating defined boundaries benefits you, your community, and your members. Helping people understand what is encouraged and acceptable in your community will help to ensure success in the long term.



THREE THOUGHTS ON THE STATE OF COMMUNITY POLICIES & GOVERNANCE FROM

Helen Chen

Senior Community Manager, Research Innovations, Inc.

“ I believe that sometimes people get scared of getting started, but you can start simply, it doesn't have to be fancy. ”

Helen's perspective on the state of policies & governance

On planning for the inevitable...

“This is your opportunity to make sure everyone is in agreement on how you are going to operate. Make sure you're all running in the same direction. If you don't have any of this stuff in place, and something goes wrong, (and I don't care if it's an internal or external community, something WILL go wrong!) people will ask, 'Oh, where do we go? Where do we turn?' When you have approved policies and guidelines in place, you can start a logical conversation and solve a problem together. If there's nothing, and there are 20 people involved with the conversation, you may have plenty opinions of how to address it and that is sheer chaos.”

On starting simply, and simply starting...

“I believe that sometimes people get scared of getting started, but you can start simply, it

doesn't have to be fancy. Start with something your average community member can understand - you'll increase shared understanding and compliance. Some communities have policies and governance that are actually created by lawyers, and they're not fun to read! I don't know that that is necessary, or increases compliance.”

On setting firm boundaries...

“Sometimes people say, “Oh, we want them to do this, but we don't want people to hold it against us!” As a community manager, I want there to be a rule for every behavior. For a successful community, we have to have a mutual understanding of where we stand on issues. We need policies that are usable, that do take into account that these are people, we want our organizations to be able to live within these realms.”

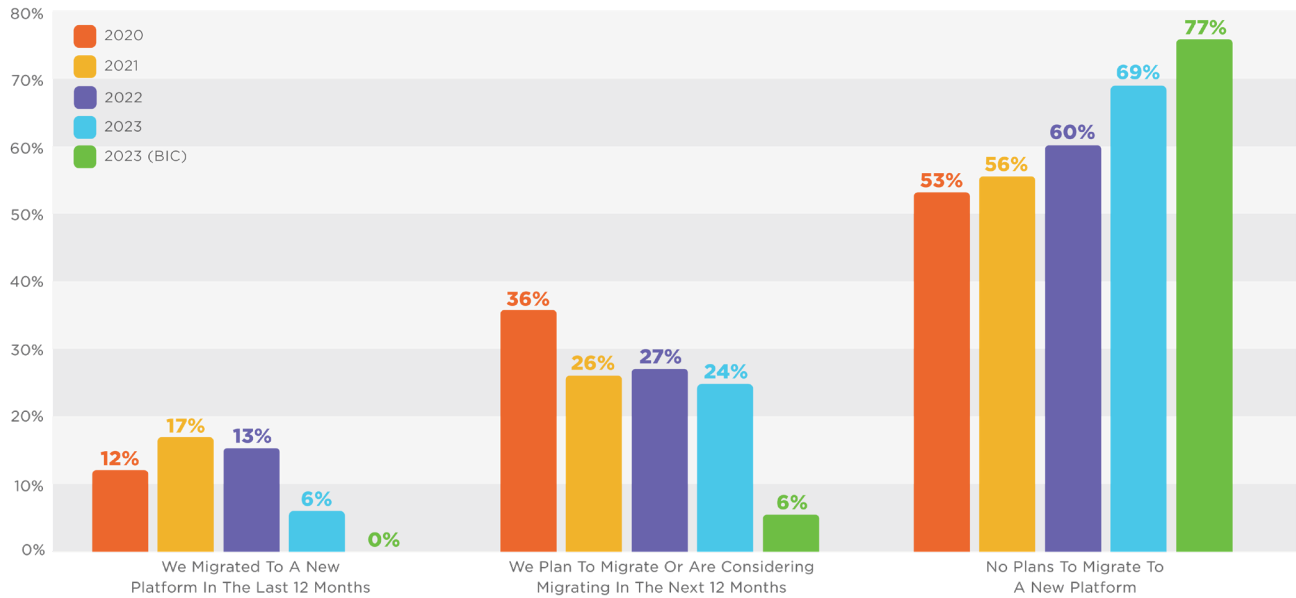
Tools

The Community Maturity Model's™ **Tools** competency considers how social technologies and a community platform are integrated into an organization's technical architecture. Such tools provide significant efficiencies and leverage but require substantial investments, including the cost of the tool itself, training, behavior changes, and environmental adjustments necessary for their effective utilization. For a deeper understanding of our approach to community tools, refer to the [Community Technology Framework™](#).

To say the landscape for community tools is unsettled at the moment is an understatement. The combination of COVID-19 and a rapidly evolving economic climate seem to have caused organizations to seek stability and one way we're seeing this manifested is in community tools.

Prior to the emergence of COVID (detailed in our [2020 State of Community Management report](#)), we saw movement and plans to migrate to new community platforms. A full 36% of the 2020 sample were either considering or already planned to migrate in the next 12 months. Compare that to this year, where only 24% of respondents indicate the same. It's even more pronounced with the best-in-class sample, where only 6% are considering or plan to migrate in the next 12 months. Given the complexity and costs associated with a migration we're not surprised and recommend community teams focus on doing the best with what they have until we've emerged from the current economic malaise.

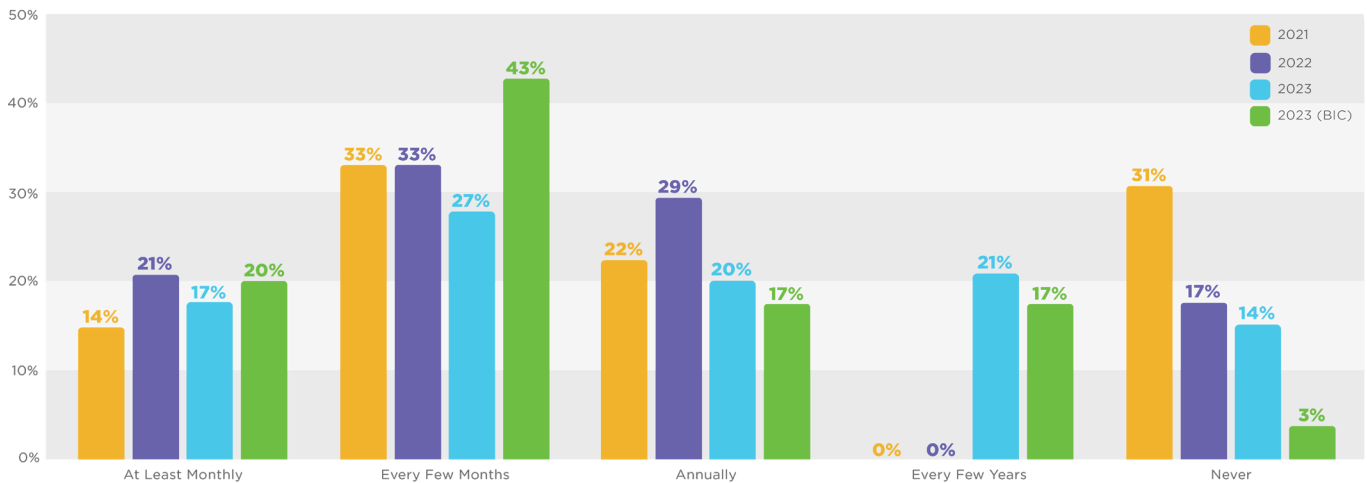
Have You Migrated or Do You Plan to Migrate to a New Primary Platform?



Keep your community platform fresh without moving to something completely new by making small changes to the design or user experience. This year’s sample is aligned with past years with a relatively even split between the different time periods for a refresh, but the best-in-class

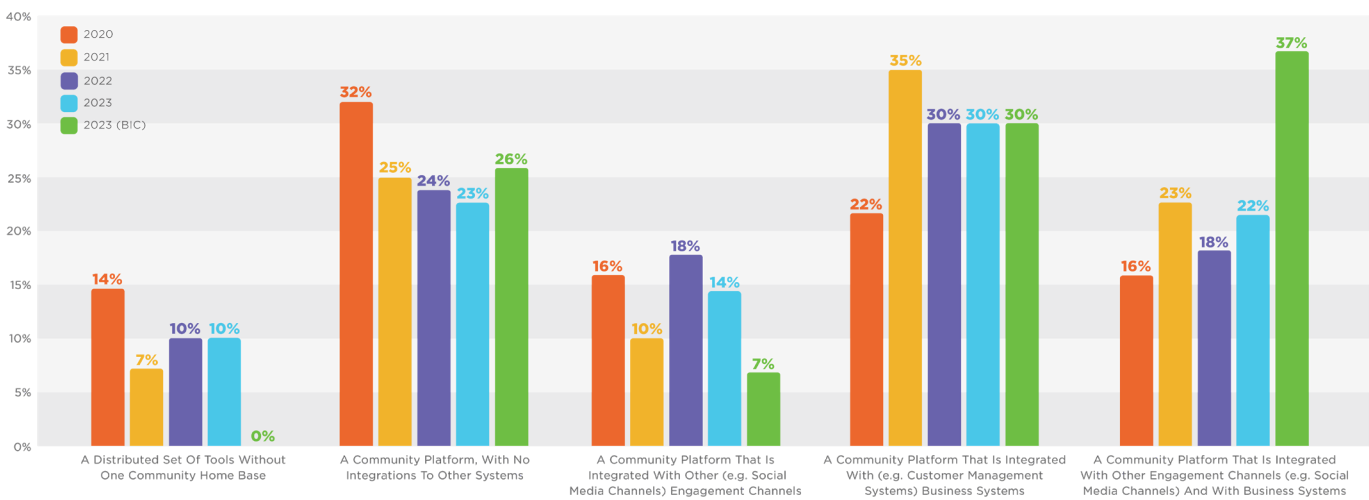
segment leans toward “every few months” and we agree that it feels right. We also want to note that very few of the best-in-class communities chose “never” and neither should you. If you don’t currently have a regular cadence for a community refresh it’s time to put one together.

About How Often Are Changes Made to the Design/UI of the Community?



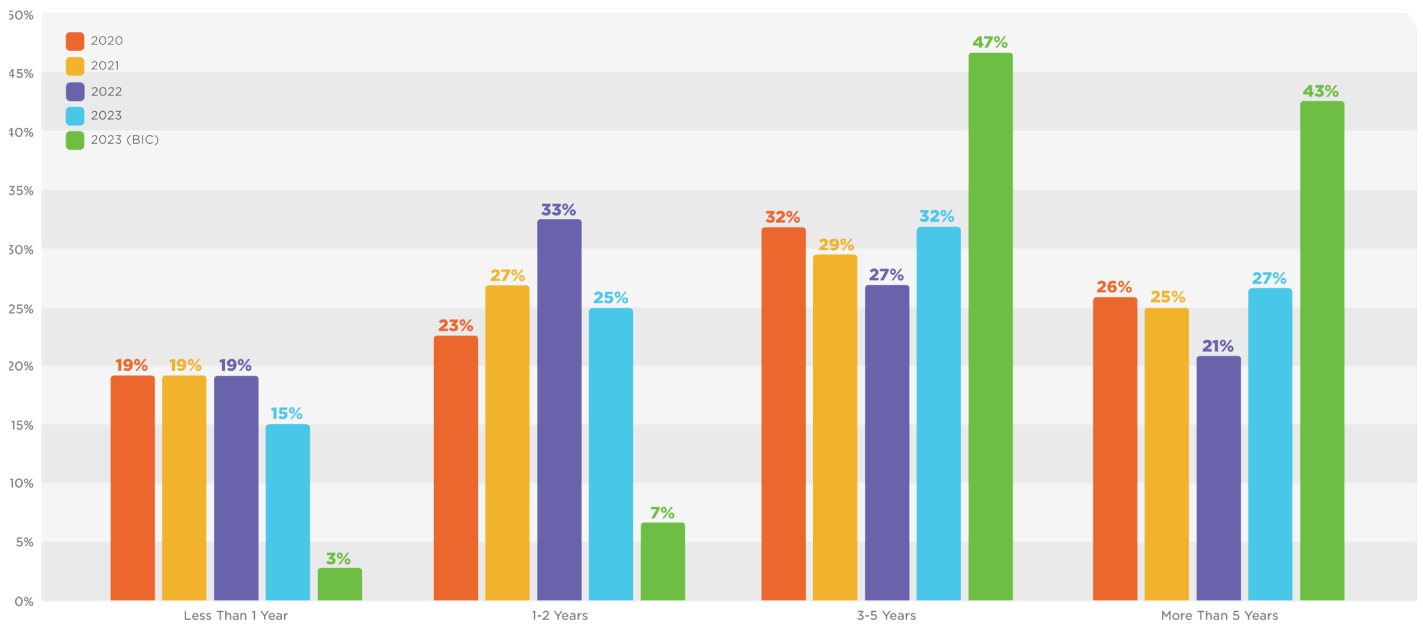
If you have a community platform, and this year's sample continues to lean in this direction, integrating it with social media, CRM and other business systems should be on your to-do list. We're pleased to see more respondents sharing that they are fully integrated (22% vs 18% in 2022) and the best-in-class segment shines here (37%). These increases largely correspond with a drop in communities with no integration or simple integrations with social media channels. This is encouraging and in line with our goal of helping community managers gain the respect of other business units. Keep working on those integrations!

What Best Describes Your Community Platform?



Some of this growth in integrations can be explained by the increase in the length of time this year’s respondents have been using their primary community platform. It stands to reason that a platform that’s been in use longer would also be more integrated into core business systems. The percentage of respondents on their platform for “less than one year” is at its lowest level in four years (15%), while the percentage of respondents reporting “more than five years” is at its highest level in that same period (27%). It is even more pronounced in the best-in-class segment, where only 3% report “less than one year” and a full 43% report “five years or more.”

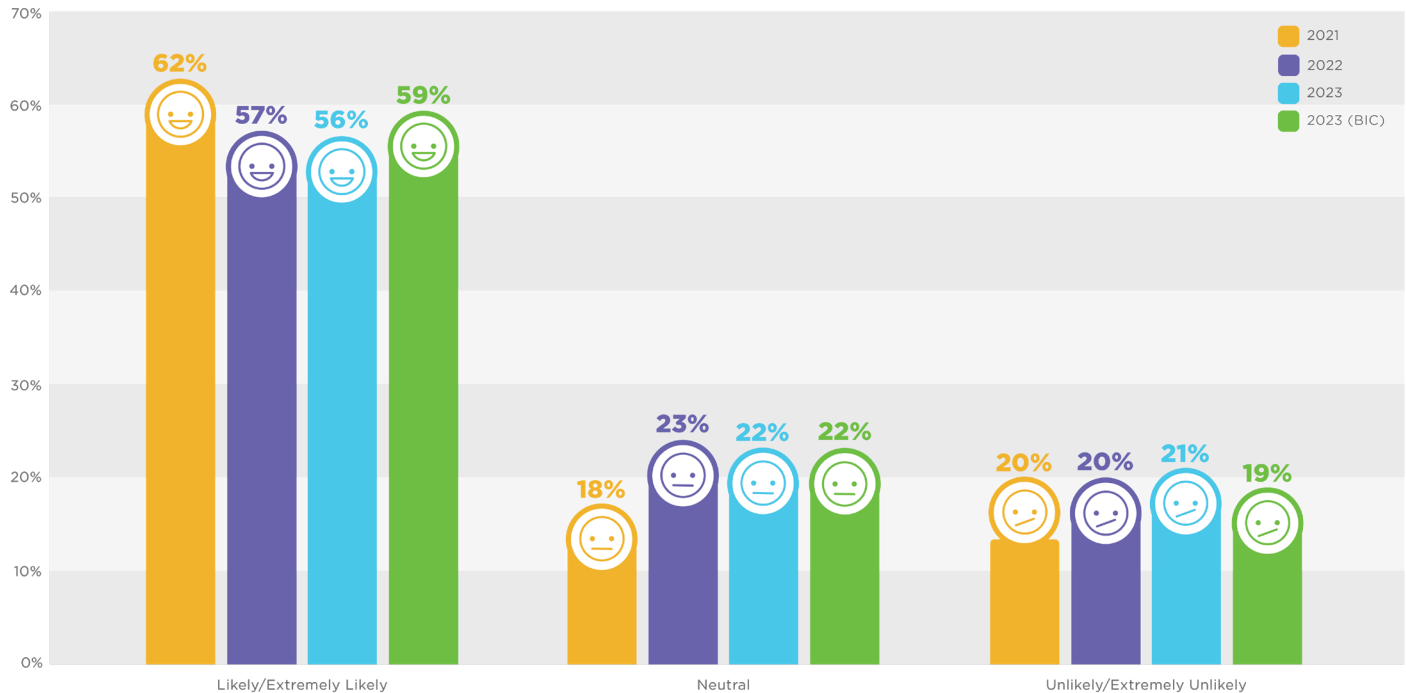
How Long Have You Been Using Your Primary Platform Provider?



Community platform providers should be working hard to retain their customers, but anecdotally (based on our conversations with TheCR Network members) they're not always putting their best foot forward. Whether it's lackluster product improvements, non-existent customer support, or a customer community with too many unanswered questions, there is room for improvement. With that said, we looked back a few years and compiled sentiment into three general categories and saw striking symmetry

from year-to-year. Generally, 59% of respondents are likely or extremely likely to recommend their community platform, 21% are neutral, and 20% are either unlikely or extremely unlikely. Converting this data to a Net Promoter Score (NPS) would yield a score of 39, a score which is considered good, but in need of improvement. We encourage any of the community platform vendors reading this section to take a hard look at what you're currently doing to turn your clients into fans and redouble those efforts.

How Likely Are You to Recommend Your Current Platform?



Recommendations

Keep your community fresh.

Absent a full community migration on the horizon, take a closer look at your community's user experience and see what you can do to make it easier and more inviting. An easy win is to add new modules to your homepage that feature active members or highlight important content.

Connect the dots.

Most of you already link your community platform to your social channels and that's a great start. Dig into other business systems that house important customer data or would benefit from the engagement data from the community. The more you can connect the dots between your community and active business systems, the more essential you become!

Speak up!

If you would hesitate to recommend your current platform vendor, speak up and let them know. Give them a chance to earn your trust. If you're a platform vendor, proactively reach out to clients regularly to see how you can better exceed their expectations and insure that critical recommendation.



THREE THOUGHTS ON THE STATE OF COMMUNITY TOOLS FROM

Peter Bradley

Manager, Community Strategy and Engagement, CSA Group

“When you start a community, you might not even have integrations. Focus on slowly building as you work your way through the Community Maturity Model - it's going to take a few years to get to that point. And that's ok!”

Peter's perspective on the state of community tools

On community recommendations...

Survey respondents were surprisingly 'meh' when it comes to their community platforms. “The data around satisfaction with platforms really surprised me! The unlikely, extremely unlikely, and the neutral numbers are almost the same. I thought that people would have a strong reaction, either positive or negative. A [lack of emotion] is the worst kind of feedback.”

On low-lift improvements...

A lot of survey respondents said they weren't up for a full platform migration right now, but that doesn't mean you can't make improvements to your community tools. “That's something that we do. We actually just redid the navigation to better line up with our corporate website. We're not upgrading the platform, because upgrading is a huge pain! But, we do whatever we can to make it feel like it's been upgraded regularly -

add-ons, like a Social Edge tile pack, or making the fonts a little different, having new banners on the homepage. We definitely have a strategy to keep it fresh.”

On the growing integration ecosystem...

Upgrading your community tools doesn't mean the hassle of switching platforms. There are a growing number of integration tools (like Common Room and Orbit) that offer integration on a much easier to manage scale. “If we look at [communities] that integrate with other systems, the likelihood of those being long-time or best-in-class communities, is pretty good. When you start a community, you might not even have integrations. Focus on slowly building as you work your way through the Community Maturity Model - it's going to take a few years to get to that point. And that's ok!”



Why Community Matters (More Now) in The Era of AI

Hans Scharler, MathWorks Community Strategy Leader

Chen Lin, MathWorks Product Manager, MATLAB Central



Hans Scharler

The bottom line on top is that community is a key differentiator in the era of artificial intelligence (AI). With the key takeaway out of the way, let's take a closer look at how AI potentially impacts community, how community must evolve, and how community managers can embrace AI to accelerate their work.

I believe that we are in a new era of AI. Generative AI has gone from being able to generate rough copies of artists' work to being able to produce photorealistic images that have won photography contests. Generative AI uses an AI model to generate new content based on a prompt. The new content ranges from images to text to even code. Apps like ChatGPT introduced the capabilities of Generative AI to over 1 billion users since its launch in November 2022. This has transformed our thinking of what's possible.

As a community manager, I initially saw ChatGPT and other Generative AI tools as a threat. The transactional parts of my community are going to be gobbled up by AI. If our community members are only looking for artifacts such as answers to questions or code examples, ChatGPT will effortlessly produce reasonably good responses with reasonably good prompts. To be successful in this new era, I need to push the community dynamics towards engagement, centered around people not artifacts. I soon realized this presents an opportunity.



Chen Lin

I have leaned in and have learned as much as possible about how to leverage AI. For me the experience has been exhilarating. I have been able to do more things, write more blogs, even write some web pages, refine my CTAs, and understand KPIs more. I feel like lightning is shooting from my fingertips. This feeling led me to the realization that everyone has this power now, so what will be differentiation among startups and companies in the coming years? It seems to me that AI has leveled the playing field. My assertion is that community is the thing that will offer the distinction in the marketplace as it is not easily duplicated. In order for our organizations to compete, our communities must embrace AI for the transactional parts of the interactions and focus on deep engagement, building connections among our members, co-creation, and authenticity. Communities must transform into a people centric model where people attract people. Push your community strategy towards open discussion, connection with each other, and community-driven development.

My new found skill is prompt engineering, the way you get great results of AI models. ChatGPT is well suited for copywriting, content transmutations, and idea generation. If you are just starting out, reset your expectations. It is not designed to do your work, but to *accelerate* your work. You still need the ideas, you just need to learn how to express them as prompts. Another thing to remember is that it is a living conversation. The first response might not be quite right, so try again, ask ChatGPT for variations, provide more

detail or an example of what you are expecting, and ask for different formats like a bullet list, an email template, a table, or even a LinkedIn post with hashtags and emojis. You will learn a lot through trial and error vs. question and answer.

Once you get comfortable with the basics of prompting, try some prompt engineering to help you as a community manager. Use ChatGPT with these prompt templates and customize for your particular needs. You will be surprised what you are now capable of doing with Generative AI.

- **Define a high-level editorial calendar template for content and themes** to support an online community for a SaaS startup. Include ideas for each month. Output as a table.
- **Help me create a rotating support model for managing an online community.** Define the problem statement, possible solutions, include a table of the pros and cons for each approach.
- **Act like a new community member who just joined an online community** for a professional community network. You were recently hired by a tech company to be a community manager. You have a technical background and are interested in working with people. What resources do you need to be successful in your new role?
- **Help me justify an increased investment to our company's community strategy.** Write three talking points that a CMO would find compelling.



Metrics & Measurement

The Community Maturity Model's™ **Metrics & Measurement** competency helps organizations understand the “why” behind their social approaches and the results they get from them. Community teams collect, analyze, and report the data back to the organization as the community grows and evolves. As the community program matures, the metrics also evolve from activity-based to performance-based and behavior-based metrics, providing better insights into the impact of the community program on an organization's business processes. This transition helps organizations evaluate their community programs and make informed decisions to improve outcomes.

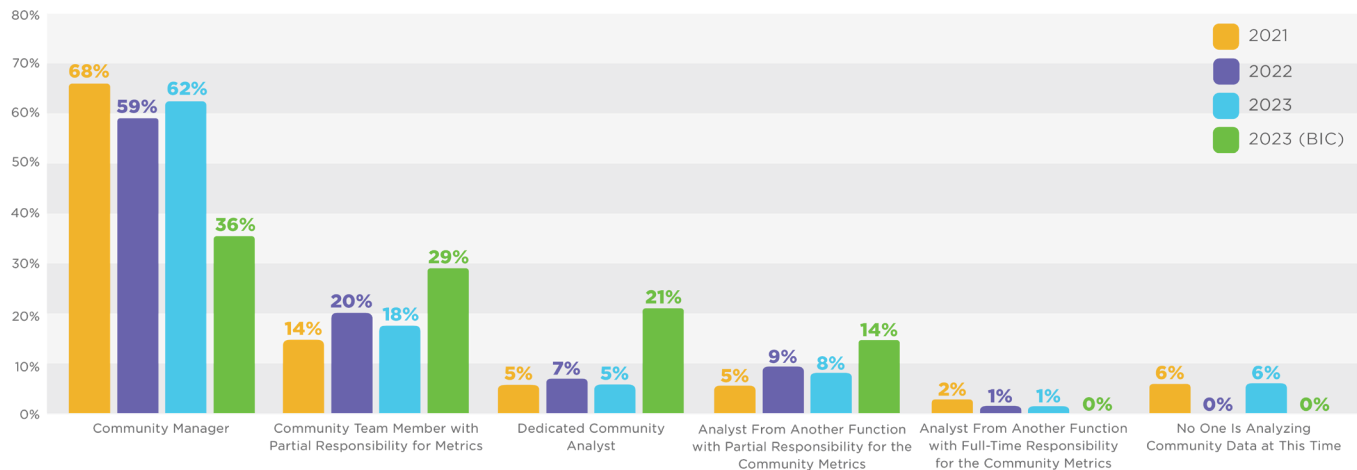
If there's one thread we can weave through most of the competency recommendations in this year's report it's evangelism. Get out there and tell your community's story. It's not just enough to just launch, grow, and sustain an active and engaged community. You also need to tie it back to business value and shout that value from the rooftops. The metrics and measurement competency is where that rubber meets the road.



While metrics and measurement are often about the “why,” they also need to share the “who” and “what.” Who analyzes community data and crafts the reports and dashboards that are distributed throughout your organization? In all community programs surveyed, community managers continue to do the lion’s share of the work in this area. We are seeing teams bring on either dedicated or part-time resources with this as their focus, freeing up the community manager

to stay dedicated to member engagement. Best-in-class community programs are 4x more likely to have a dedicated community analyst than the survey average. Increasingly, we see this role as the first additional hire after a community begins to build momentum and we think this is a smart choice. The skills required to properly analyze community data is completely different than the skills needed to manage an active community.

Who is Primarily Responsible for Analyzing Community Data, Metrics, and Reporting?

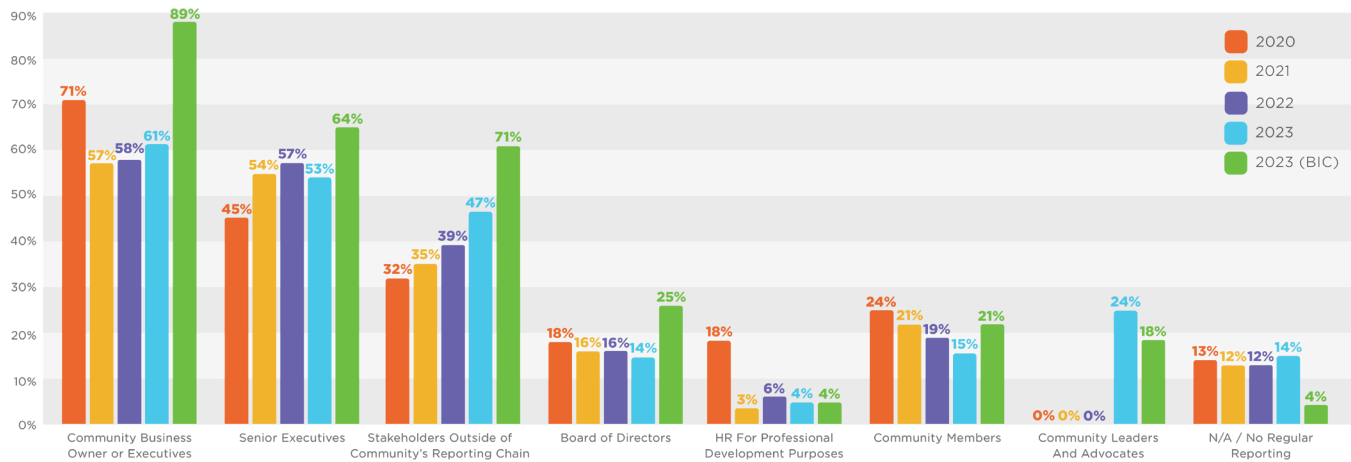




It's also interesting to analyze "who" is receiving community reports. Community business owners, senior executives, and stakeholders outside of the community's reporting chain are consistently the top three groups over the last four years (in that order). The first two make sense from a self-preservation perspective - make sure to keep your

boss and your boss's boss informed. The third group shows an ever-increasing focus on internal evangelism. The growth of reporting outside the formal reporting chain is a trend we love to see and need to note how far ahead best-in-class community programs are in this area when compared to their average peers (71% vs 47%).

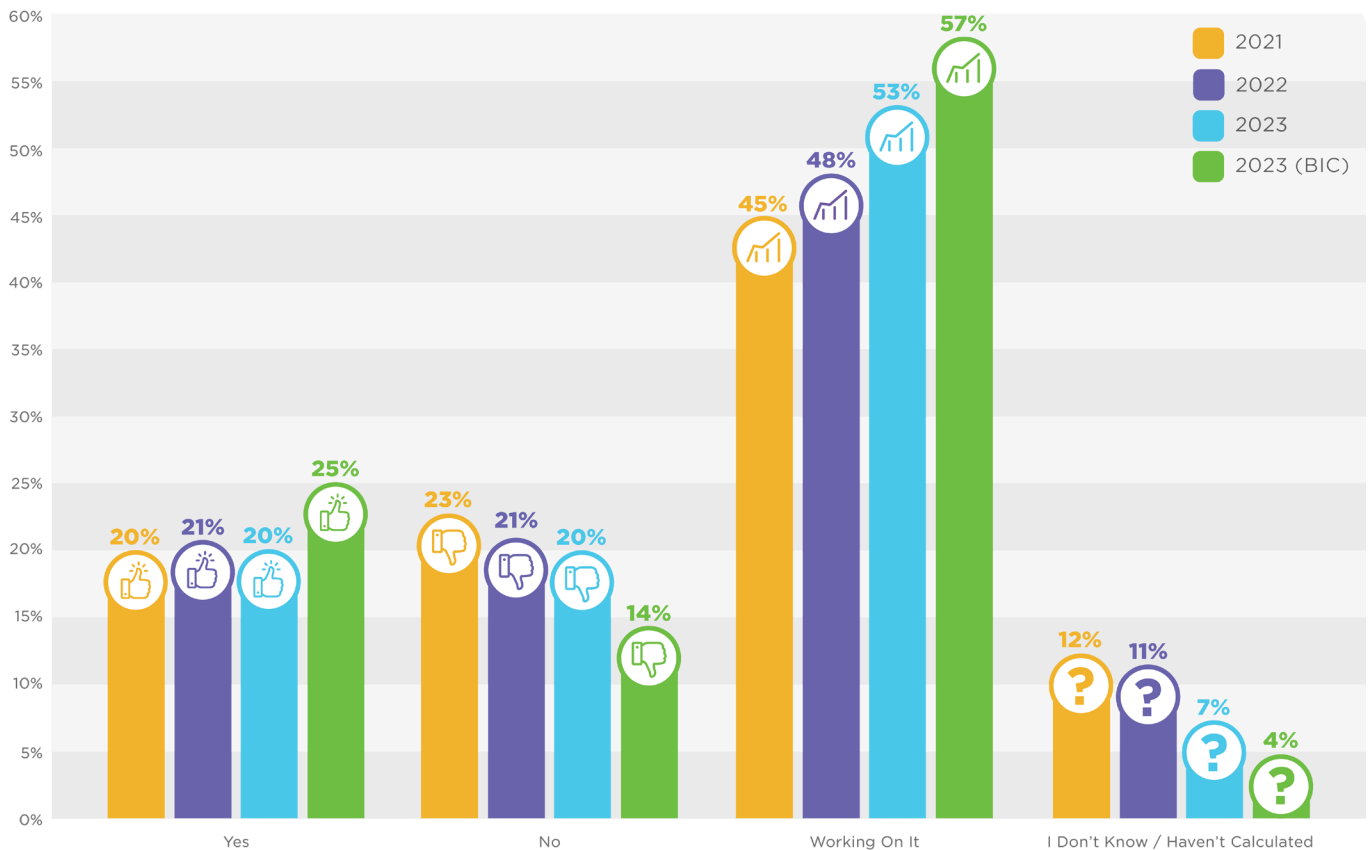
What Audiences Receive Community Reports?





Calculating or demonstrating community value (qualitatively or quantitatively) can be challenging, but it's clearly on community manager's radar - as it should be. A full 73% of our survey average and 82% of the best-in-class sample can calculate value or are working on it. Being able to report on your community's value to the organization is a critical step in telling your story. If you reported "no" or "don't know" it's time to get started. Talk to your peers in the space to learn how they got started.

Can You Prove / Calculate Community Value (Qualitatively or Quantitatively)?

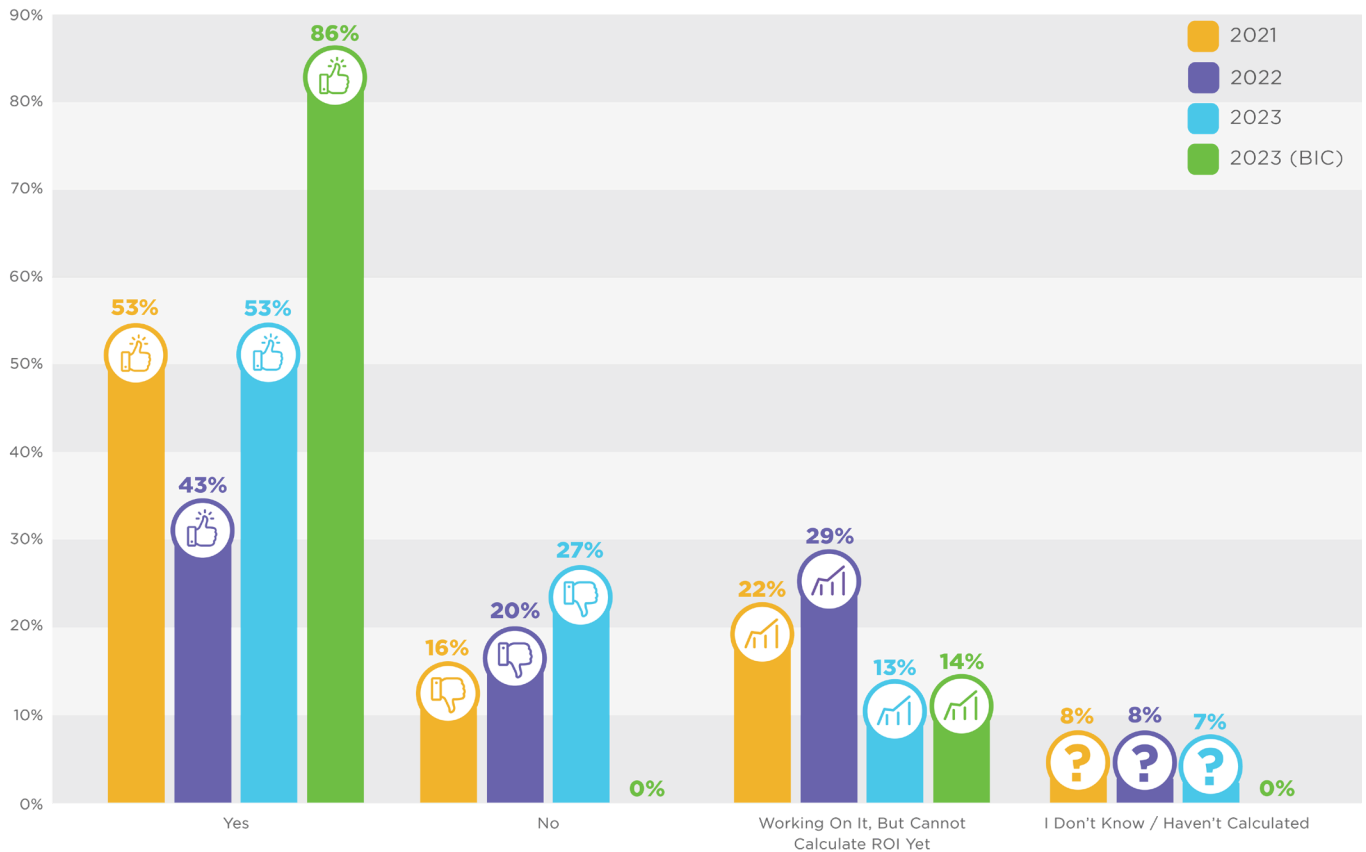




Calculating financial return on investment (ROI) is the next step and can help you lobby for additional resources to build/grow your community program. Best-in-class programs understand this and 86% are able to report the financial ROI of their programs (vs only 53% of the survey average). Even more stunning, none of the best-in-class respondents responded “no” to this prompt. The entire balance is “working on it.” This is compared to 34% of the general sample that responded “no” or “I don’t know.”

Some ROI models can be exceedingly complex and hard to complete/calculate, which is why we created the [Community ROI Calculator](#). Simply plug in a few readily available figures to calculate your ROI today!

Can You Calculate Financial ROI For Your Community Program?



Recommendations

Carve out time for analysis.

The day-to-day work of running a community requires a unique skill set that's dramatically different from that of data analysis. Even if you're not resourced with a part-time or dedicated analyst, you should set aside specific time to dig into the data. Multitasking while working on data analysis invariably ends in mistakes and frustration.

Get out of your bubble.

Sending reports up the community reporting chain is essential, but where best-in-class programs shine is in keeping groups/divisions indirectly impacted by community programs in the loop. Expand your reporting distribution to include people that might be able to leverage community approaches - but aren't ready just yet.

Numbers are your friend.

Being able to prove community value and calculate community ROI are essential components of any successful community program. If you're currently doing this, great! Keep it up. If not, partner with enthusiastic supporters to help you get started.



THREE THOUGHTS ON THE STATE OF COMMUNITY METRICS & MEASUREMENT FROM

Nicole Saunders

Director, Community, Zendesk

“The lesson is to take whatever data you have, look at it with a critical eye, and make sure you really understand it and the story it’s telling.”

Nicole’s perspective on the state of metrics & measurement

On community analysts...

“I loved seeing data about starting to hire dedicated analysts, and having those resources because that was one of my first hires when my team started to mature. She’s 50% operations manager and 50% analyst, but honestly, most of the work she’s been doing is on the analyst side! It’s extremely impactful for me and our team, we’re doing our first ever QBR this month, because we now have data where we can show business impact in actual dollars.”

On flexing your metrics muscles...

“Get good at taking the data that you have and telling a story with it. I’ve seen a lot of people when getting started with metrics and measurement, saying, “Here’s a bunch of data - figure out what it means for me!” My recommendation is to really start to develop that muscle to understand the data, have a critical eye towards it, and then tell that story.”

On not being afraid to ask questions...

“I see a lot of people start out by getting a report from somewhere, and they just look at it go, “well, that’s my data!” But, they don’t know how to look at it critically. At one role, the team told me they thought engagement was decreasing, based on their page view data. When I dug into the data, I realized that the perceived decrease in engagement was actually when we started filtering spam out. Page views were actually going up, it just looked like engagement was down because half the report included spam posts and half didn’t. By digging in and asking the right questions, I was able to demonstrate that legitimate page views were actually going up and that we were doing a great job keeping spam bots out! It took me digging into the data and questioning it where no one else had. I remember thinking, “Huh, that’s a weird thing. Why would your community engagement go down when your customer base is growing?” The lesson is to take whatever data you have, look at it with a critical eye, and make sure you really understand it and the story it’s telling.”

The Community Maturity Model™

Measuring Community Management Maturity

Community programs have existed longer than they've been named, and have always been hard to measure because of their diversity, complexity, and emergent nature.

In the mid-90s communities began popping up online, bringing their dynamics into focus — allowing us to see how communities formed, developed, and evolved. This led to the creation of the community manager role and the discipline of community management.

The Community Maturity Model™, established in 2009, defines the eight competencies

and four stages that most impact the development of a healthy, productive, and effective community.

Use the Community Maturity Model™ to:

- Train and educate stakeholders on the needs of good community operation
- Assess the community approach
- Benchmark progress and identify gaps
- Develop a roadmap and budget for the community program

See how your community measures up with our [Community Maturity Model™](#).

	1 Hierarchy	2 Emergent Community	3 Community	4 Networked
Strategy	Competitive	Reciprocal	Cooperative	Interdependent
Leadership	Directive	Engaged	Influential	Inspiring
Culture	Resistant	Contributive	Supportive	Collaborative
Community Management	Absent	Encouraging	Mentoring	Empowering
Content & Programming	Structured	Responsive	Emergent	Co-created
Policies & Governance	Rigid	Restrictive	Flexible	Inclusive
Tools	Ad hoc	Defined	Integrated	Adaptive
Metrics & Measurement	Transactional	Experiential	Behavioral	Strategic

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The Community Engagement Framework™

Measuring Engagement and Value

Since 2009, we've focused on measuring the impact of community leadership, which can be seen through our Community Engagement Framework™. This valuable tool was designed for organizations struggling to prove the engagement and value of their communities.

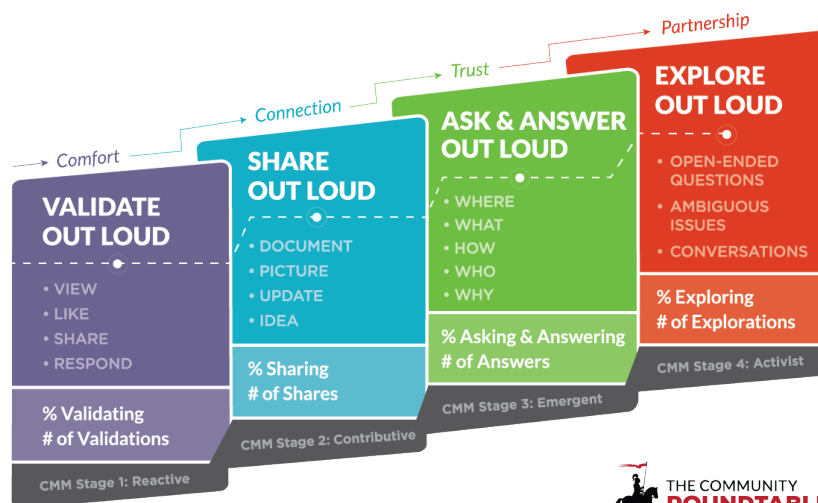
The Community Engagement Framework™ helps:

- Deconstruct and categorize the range of engagement behaviors
- Connect ideal engagement objectives based on business objectives
- Link behaviors with qualitative outcomes: Comfort, connect, trust, and partnership

- Identify how to measure the depth and breadth of engagement types
- Translate engagement to value and calculate ROI

Using the Community Engagement Framework™ to measure community engagement — and track how it changes over time — lets organizations see how trust shifts in their organizations and markets.

This tool explains what we've learned working with thousands of clients. [Download a high resolution version of the framework.](#)



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The Community Skills Framework™

Measuring Community Skills and Gaps

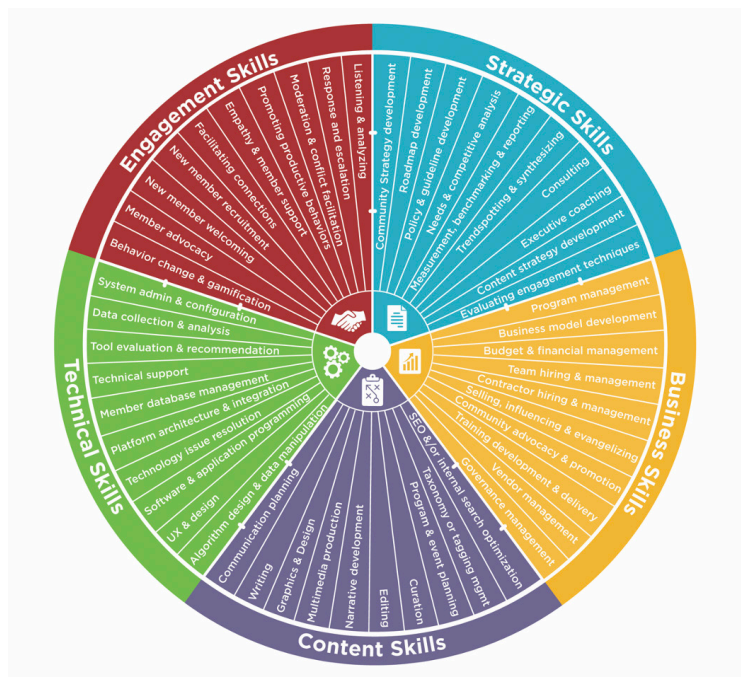
A community manager’s work is critical to the success of the program, but it’s largely invisible to the members. This is called the “iceberg effect”. The efforts seen by the community are supported by vast amounts of work beneath the surface — the planning and coordination. Without this crucial work, the rest of the iceberg would topple over.

While most community managers perform similar tasks, the roles themselves are becoming more diverse. There’s no single definition of “what a community manager does!” The focus, size, and use case dictates which management style is required for the community to thrive. Combine that with a growing community that can support specialized roles (e.g., community operations

manager, strategist, and technical lead), and we find the many skill sets that create a great community manager.

The Community Skills Framework™ includes five skill families with 10 skills each, prioritized based on findings from our extensive community management research. This isn’t every skill a community manager needs, but it’s a great foundation for understanding what typical skills are needed, and what to focus on throughout your career. Teams can also use it to identify gaps to support strategic hiring.

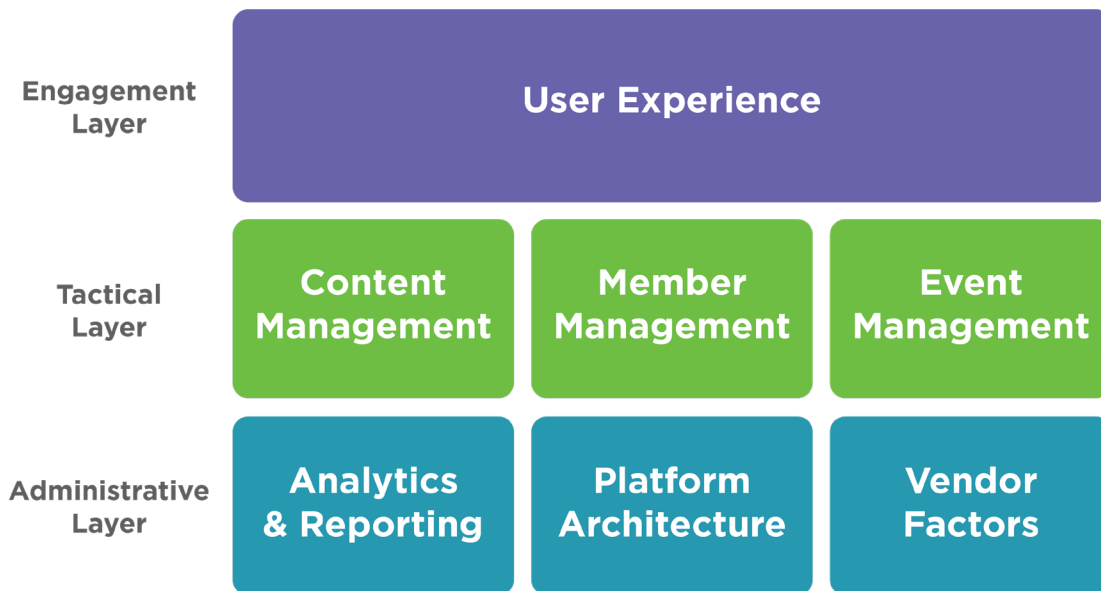
[Learn more about our Community Skills Framework™.](#)



The Community Technology Framework™

The Community Roundtable developed the Community Technology Framework™ in 2019 to acknowledge that technology is what enables community professionals to engage and lead in new ways, and is a critical component of a successful online community program.

While we believe that technology ≠ community, a thoughtful community technology strategy ensures that you have the technology in place to create an effective and elegant community solution. [Learn more and assess your technology ecosystem here.](#)



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Community 101

Intro to Community Models and Frameworks

Whether you're new to community management, or just want to review the fundamentals, this short, on-demand course provides a comprehensive overview of the four frameworks and models at the foundation of successful community programs.

Complete this free course in TheCR Academy and receive your certification in Community Models and Frameworks. Learn more or start now.

[Learn more or start now.](#)





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