



# Uncovering community goals and gaining internal support

It can be really difficult to uncover the goals of a community.

Sometimes this is because the community does not have any goals. The organization has never really considered what the community is for and instead has launched the community because it seemed like the *right thing to do*.

Sometimes this is because the organization has goals but they are not widely understood by people within the organization. They might have been created by the community manager or a member of staff without consulting senior executives within the organization.

Sometimes the community has multiple goals for the community and needs clarification on which to prioritize. The community might be trying to serve multiple departments.

Our purpose in this document is to provide you with a list of questions you can ask to uncover the goals of the community. This is most useful for community managers who are new to their role or those who need to gain additional support for their project.

## A few notes on using this

You will not need to ask every question listed here. Ask a few and clarify your understanding before moving on. The objective of this is as much about your audience understanding and crystallizing the goal of the community as much as it is about you knowing the goal of the community. Keep discussions relaxed and informal. If you hit a *pressure point* (i.e. you're sensing some resistance to answering the question, either rephrase or move on – especially if you are sitting in a group).

Very often people will want to crystallize their own thoughts before discussing something in a group. You can follow up with questions later. No-one wants to be put on the spot in a difficult situation with colleagues waiting their response.

Always make sure you ask more than one question regardless of the answer. Often you will detect some resistance or discomfort. Other times you might uncover additional goals of the community. Also be aware that sometimes senior stakeholders will not have financial goals in mind. They might believe that the end result will be achieved regardless. This attitude can be tricky to appreciate and we will cover this later.



# A Final Important Note

It is important to note that the community manager should never set the *goal* for the community. This leads to a goal that is not well internalized by the organization and is not considered a priority.

The community manager should instead lead discussions to help *uncover the goal* of the community. You can add additional constraints in this process, highlight opportunities, and guide understanding. However, the goal ultimately has to originate from the senior team themselves. They have to convince themselves of the value of the community by uncovering their own goal.

# Finding The Key Stakeholders

Your first goal is to identify who the senior stakeholders are involved with the community. These are the people with either a direct line responsibility, the people whose budget pays for the community, or those with the greatest interest or influence in the community. You can ask your boss the following questions to uncover these and even your colleagues to uncover these answers

1. Where did the idea for the community come from?
2. Who in the organization supported it?
3. Is there anyone who didn't support it?
4. From whose budget does the community get support?
5. If I wanted to do "x", whose permission would I need?
6. Who does that person report to?
7. How are decisions made around here? Is it who you know, what you know, or what you can prove?
8. If there is a disagreement about the right path to proceed in the community, who resolves it?
9. How high up in the organization is awareness of the community?
10. Whose credibility is on the line here?
11. Who benefits most from the community's success?
12. Has the CEO approved the community?

*You can substitute {x} for any activity you like*

By the end of this discussion you should have a *very clear idea* of who is responsible and actively engaged in the community at a high level. See [our stakeholder framework](#) for more information here.



# Identifying goals

The key challenge at this level is to *identify the goals* of the community. This will usually mean uncovering the organization's biggest opportunities or problems and seeing where the community might fit in. At this level you are looking to create a clear link to value.

13. Why was the community initially created? What was the rationale?
14. What is the ideal outcome you wish to see from the community?
15. What did {economic buyer} expect from the community?
16. What is most important to [economic buyer]?
17. What is most important to the CEO?
18. What is most important to [your boss]?
19. What are the biggest challenges facing the organization and this department today?
20. What are the biggest opportunities for the organization and this department today?
21. If the community succeeded, what would be different at the organizational level?
22. ...and if this happens, how would that help the organization?
23. What kind of ROI % would the organization be looking for?
24. What kind of goals do other departments in the organization have?
25. What would blow you away? What would really surpass your expectations?

These are the tougher questions. Most of the initial answers you receive will be based upon things that are vague. These will be things like loyalty, research, engagement, innovation etc...These answers aren't necessarily wrong, but you need to push past them to identify what they would mean in a tangible sense. If loyalty improves, what would that mean exactly? Does this mean increase retention? More advocacy etc? Don't prime these answers, but gently probe until you hit the final wall.

Another benefit here is that pushing to this level lets people taste the success of the community. The more specific you can be, the more people can imagine the outcome and the more real it becomes in their minds. If you're having trouble pushing past the barrier, [this resource might help](#).



# Understanding value metrics

It is not enough to establish a goal for the community if there is no mechanism to measure it. Hopefully in your answers above you identified very specific benefits the organization wants to gain from the community. This might be increased customer retention, advocacy, support etc... Sometimes these benefits will naturally lead to clear metrics you can measure but it's more likely you need to do a little work in this area.

At this stage you begin to muddle into the area of how much of the calculation is provided by them and how much is provided by you. Large organizations will be very different from smaller organizations here. They might have their own data science or analytics teams to run a multiple regression analysis and determine ROI. Others might be waiting on you to make the calculations.

26. How will you know if the community has been successful?
27. What metrics would you like to see shared in internal reports?
28. How are other departments within the organization measured today?
29. How do other departments establish it was their own efforts that achieved the goal?
30. How are metrics currently shared within the organization (by whom and with whom?)
31. How frequently will these reports be produced?
32. What is the methodology and process to produce the reports?
33. Are calculations performed by the department or by a finance/data team within the organization?

Your goal here is to clarify specifically what target you're trying to hit. 90% of professionals in this space paint the bullseye around the arrow. Don't do this. You don't want to walk away with anything less than a specific metric you're trying to move the needle on here. If the metric is vague in your mind, then it's vague in their mind too. And if the metric is vague in their mind then it doesn't hold a clear value proposition in their minds. So push a little to get to that core metric you need to move.



# What behavior will you expect members to perform?

Once you know what metric you're trying to move, you want to put in place some key performance indicators to aim for. This is a really important step in the buy-in process. It ensures that stakeholders have logically thought through what behavior members need to perform to achieve that goal. For example, if your goal is customer retention or satisfaction, you might identify the best way to achieve it is to get quick responses to customer questions. That means you need a lot of people asking and answering questions.

Your entire strategy is going to be based upon getting people to perform these sorts of *valuable behaviors*. This will also help you answer questions later on about why you're pursuing a specific strategy.

Sometimes it's not possible to push at this level, but we recommend you do. The more someone understands why you're trying to get members to perform a certain way the more they are likely to support you.

34. What specific behaviors will members need to perform to achieve these goals?
35. Do you have any data or examples of this that you can share?
36. What kind of customer actions have achieved similar goals in the past?
37. What is currently working well within the organization to achieve [goal]?
38. What have you tried in the past that hasn't worked? Why didn't it work?
39. Have you seen any other organizations achieve this behavior? How did they do it?
40. What has caused this behavior recently?
41. Why aren't customers/members/audience already performing this behavior today?
42. Do you have any data, research, or interviews about members and these behaviors?
43. Can I speak to and interview members about this behavior?
44. If members did {x}, would this be enough to cause [goal]?
45. Are there any internal obstacles that might prevent me from doing something to drive this behavior?
46. Is there anything we should take care to avoid asking members to do?



## Conclusion

Ultimately the act of asking questions is as much about establishing you as an expert consultant focused on achieving your stakeholder's goals as much as it is about identifying those goals. Don't let yourself be relegated to the tactical 'engagement' level. That is not a good role for you or your career. Definitely don't wait to be told what the goals are. You need to be proactively and ruthlessly identifying and achieving the goals of your stakeholders.

Most importantly, when it comes to gaining internal support the best bang for your buck is to build relationships with people whose support you need (*before you need it!*). Perhaps the best way to build a strong relationship is to take the time to truly listen to your audience and ensure you understand and appreciate their needs. Once you have this information and you've built these relationships it becomes a lot easier to get the support you need.

Good luck!