

# COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



## Working with communities of practice

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A community is a group of people that are brought together by having something in common; such as location, interests, occupations or ownership. Whatever it is that binds groups together, the potential of the community lies in their ability to form constructive relationships, interact and communicate with one another and sometimes to co-create something such as a product or output. When thinking about forming a community of practice, ask who you already have a relationship with, or who would you like to form a relationship with, and for what purpose. Ask yourself what value you hope to provide to or co-create with these people.



## Dedicated group

Each community is unique, and the level and nature of the engagement will depend on the energies, capacities and resources of the lead organisation or set of individuals. Without enthusiasm, time and dedication, a community will struggle to flourish and grow. Bringing together at least two people, or a small core group, will help share roles, spark ideas, encourage collaboration and foster a sense of community from the inside-out.

## Value proposition examples

1. **Ask for help** - solution seekers & solution providers
2. **Critical reflection** - seeking diverse opinions on complex questions
3. **Belonging** - feeling part of something that aligns with your values and interests
4. **Learning** - peer-learning from expert members
5. **Collaboration** - forming relationships and developing ideas that may lead to co-creation of projects & opportunities
6. **Co-creation** - getting together to produce something new





# ENGAGING YOUR COMMUNITY

This resource provides further guidance on ways to engage your community via the groups.io platform and beyond.

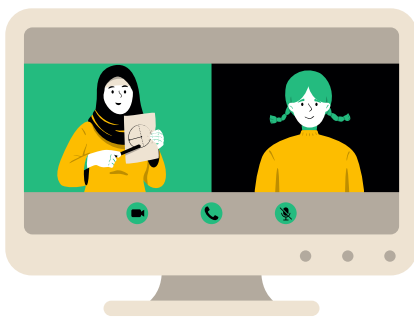
## E-discussions

The Dgroups Foundation provides guidance and support to prepare and facilitate fruitful community e-discussions. Email-based and asynchronous, e-discussions allow all community members to contribute their experience and insights towards common areas of enquiry.

## Community knowledge

The groups.io platform has features that allow the storing and organising of community resources and assets. The Dgroups Foundation can provide advice on how to gather and share knowledge and learning opportunities relevant to community members; and co-create and store community knowledge assets.

## Virtual events



Virtual (and in-person events) are excellent ways to build relationships and provide value in the form of learning together and potential collaborations. They can also encourage ownership that leads to self-sustaining communities.

## Integration



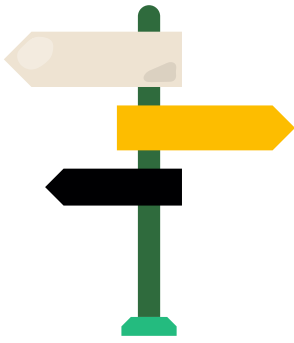
Your community may exist to serve the needs of its members, but you probably also hope to gain some value for a wider organisation or initiative. Therefore, it is important to have a clear strategy on how your community supports broader goals, and aligns with other activities.



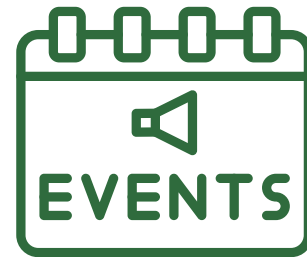
## Example e-discussion (& virtual event) plan & schedule

EMAIL # & TOPIC	EMAIL CONTENT / QUESTIONS	SEND DATE AND SENT BY	FIRST RESPONDERS
<b>EMAIL ONE: MEMBER GUIDANCE &amp; E-DISCUSSION ANNOUNCEMENT</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• GET READY FOR AN E-DISCUSSION STARTING XX (IN LEAD UP TO EVENT ON XX)</li> <li>• INTRODUCE E-DISCUSSION FACILITATOR</li> <li>• RECEIVING EMAILS - ADDING EMAIL TO SAFE SENDER LIST</li> <li>• REPLYING TO EXISTING TOPICS - PARTICIPATING IN THE DISCUSSION, (INCLUDING LANGUAGE OPTIONS)</li> </ul>	DATE AND PERSON RESPONSIBLE FOR SENDING	COMMUNITY MEMBERS IDENTIFIED AND CONTACTED, WHO AGREE TO RESPOND TO THE MESSAGE ON THE DAY IT IS SENT, IN ORDER TO ENCOURAGE OTHER COMMUNITY MEMBERS TO RESPOND
<b>EMAIL TWO: E-DISCUSSION KICK-OFF</b>	<p>1. PLEASE INTRODUCE YOURSELF IN A SENTENCE AND TELL US WHAT OPPORTUNITIES OR CHALLENGES YOU ARE FACING IN YOUR WORK (OR SPECIFIC TO TOPIC)</p> <p>2. *FIRST QUESTION*</p> <p>ADDITIONAL GUIDANCE ON PARTICIPATING IN THE DISCUSSION</p>		
<b>EMAIL THREE: MIDWEEK SUMMARY</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SUMMARY OF RESPONSES IF THE DISCUSSION IS VERY ACTIVE.</li> </ul>		
<b>EMAIL FOUR: WEEKLY SUMMARY</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SUMMARY OF RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS, HIGHLIGHTING KEY THEMES AND ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS</li> <li>• INDIVIDUALLY THANK MEMBERS WHO CONTRIBUTED, SPOTLIGHTING 'SUPER CONTRIBUTORS'</li> </ul>		
<b>EMAIL FIVE: SECOND ROUND OF QUESTIONS</b>	<p>1. *SECOND QUESTION*</p> <p>2. *THIRD QUESTION*</p>		
<b>EMAIL SIX: SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION &amp; REMINDER FOR VIRTUAL EVENT</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SUMMARY OF RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS, HIGHLIGHTING KEY THEMES AND ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS</li> <li>• REMINDER OF REGISTRATION FOR VIRTUAL EVENT (IF RELEVANT)</li> </ul>		
<b>EMAIL SEVEN: EVENT CONTENT</b>	SHARE RECORDING OF EVENT AND OTHER RESOURCES E.G PPT WITH SHORT MESSAGE		
<b>EMAIL EIGHT: EVENT SUMMARY</b>	SUMMARY REPORT OF EVENT		



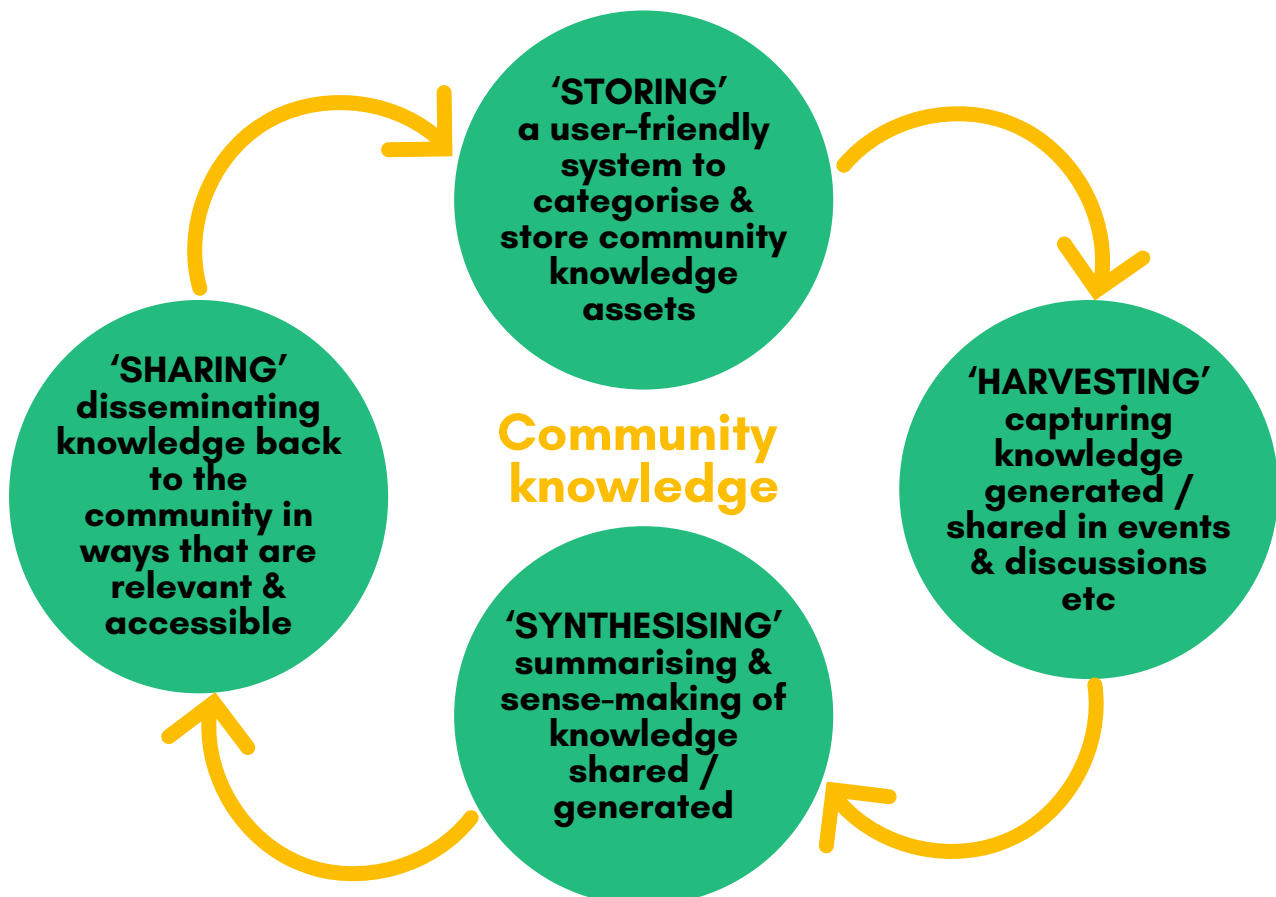


## Community knowledge & assets



When managing your community it is helpful to consider how you will manage the community knowledge and resources or 'assets'. The community may decide together what is considered a knowledge asset and how it should be stored, using the file or database features and further shared.

Using the calendar feature on the groups.io platform is a great way to keep your community informed of upcoming opportunities and relevant events. You may want to set this feature to allow members to upload their own events, or invite them to submit event details via a Google form or email to a member of the core group. To avoid too many group emails, you can set a weekly or bi-weekly event round-up email to go out to your community.



## Virtual community events

The groups.io platform is a great way for community members to interact and share in their own time via e-discussions. However, from time-to-time you may wish to bring your community together online for a virtual event. These offer the opportunity for members to build relationships, learn and collaborate and strengthen the community.

### Example one: Networking & collaboration

A **World Cafe** is a fun and dynamic way to allow your community to network with one another, whilst collaboratively exploring discussion questions together. They are usually 60-90 minutes and comprise of an introduction from the host, including the instructions for the process. It is advised to have breakouts of 4-5 people, and allow 10-15 minutes per round. The number of breakout rooms will be dependent on the number of participants, so you may have to manage this in real time and be prepared with less or more questions. Questions can be sourced from the community or proposed by the hosts. You can also consider a short presentation or panel discussion before the breakouts to spark the discussions. You may want to assign a facilitator and note taker for each breakout, or allow the groups to self-facilitate and share notes via a digital tool. You may also choose if you would like the groups to report back on their discussions.

For further information please visit:  
<https://www.barbaracv.com/blog/how-to-organise-and-facilitate-a-virtual-world-cafe/>



### Example two: Learning & reflection

If your community is looking for space for critical reflection on themes and topics of interest to members, then you may want to put together a series of learning events. Sometimes referred to as '**lunch and learn**' or '**brown bag lunch**' events, these are usually 45-60 mins and comprise of a short presentation to introduce a topic that can spark discussion with the group. They are suited to smaller groups of up to 20 participants, to allow people time to speak as a whole group. However, virtual breakout groups could be used for larger groups. The hosts may be sourced from the community over time, or invited from outside of the community. You may wish to create a monthly or bi-monthly programme to create a rhythm for your members. This approach is suited to communities who share a specific topic of interest and want to go deeper individually. It could lead to further member connections and collaborations, however, the intention is more on individual learning in a space of group reflection, than collaboration.





## Creating synergy between your community & other communications

### Newsletters

Newsletters are a great way to highlight what is happening in your community, spotlight members and promote events. Ensure there is a clear differentiation between the purpose of the community and the purpose of the newsletter to avoid duplication of information and confusion for recipients.

### Social media

Social media can be a great way to engage new membership for the community.

### Other communication channels

This might be a website, WhatsApp group, radio programme etc that can promote community activities, outputs and engage new membership.



## Integrating your community into your strategy

Whilst a sense of belonging and a reflective, critical space, may serve as the main purpose for some communities, others will come together for a more specific shared purpose. If this is the case, then it can be helpful to facilitate community activities that allow members to shape and co-create strategy, and clarify and align on the purpose and goals. If the community serves a wider organisational goal, then it will be essential to ensure the necessary capacity and resource is available to support the growth and engagement of the community, as well as buy-in from other organisational actors.

**For further reading:** [More effective online collaboration, dialogue and interaction – What works in international development?](#)

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The Dgroups Foundation was established in 2009 to facilitate and provide governance to the Dgroups 'partnership' - a group of organisations committed to enhance online collaboration and interaction in development, human rights and humanitarian aid. From 2002-2018, the partners created and ran the dgroups.org community platform. Since 2019, the Foundation brokers simple, effective and affordable solutions, knowledge and expertise to enhance collaboration among organizations, projects, networks and campaigns in international development.

[dgroups.info](http://dgroups.info)



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