



Defense Acquisition University Communities of Practice Engagement Best Practices Guide

Best practices and engagement ideas for successful online collaborative spaces

The **Defense Acquisition University (DAU)** is the primary training organization for the Defense Acquisition Workforce. Our products and services enhance workplace performance, promote mission effectiveness, and help reshape the workforce to meet future challenges—ultimately developing fully qualified acquisition professionals who provide cost-effective systems, equipment, and services to meet warfighter requirements.

July 2019 Edition

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1.0 What Is The Purpose Of This Guide?

The primary goal of this guide is to facilitate engagement in our communities by offering up proven practices and activities that promote member interaction, membership growth, and return users. The engagement we are seeking is one in which members actively participate in the community by contributing content and sharing their experience and expertise. Establishing an environment that nurtures and supports engagement does not happen on its own; it takes concerted effort on the part of those managing the community to build a trusted environment where members feel secure contributing content, asking questions, and sharing what they know. An underlying aspect of building engagement is members finding value in participating in the community. Community value and member engagement are intertwined, and part of the community management job is to create that value by offering up quality content on topics of interest that attract members to the community and make them want to stay and engage. This guide is intended to benefit the CoP Leaders and Moderators as they seek to create value and engage their community members (see also [Tips for Engaging Community Members](#)).

2.0 Why Engage Your Community Members?

Communities provide a collaborative capability that allows individuals to share and connect across organizational boundaries on acquisition- and business-related topics. The value of tapping into the expertise of an experienced workforce and providing a forum for sharing is powerful. By building a climate that promotes sharing and fosters connections, you create value to the community and perpetuate pathways for member engagement. The social aspect invites members to participate by contributing content, responding to questions, and engaging in professional networking.

Becoming a community requires members to interact and engage with one another. Through a high level of member engagement, we intend to create vibrant and interactive community spaces where members go to seek answers and advice on topics related to their field of interest; where members can share ideas and practices that have proven added value; and where value can be translated into increased productivity, saved time, improved quality, and quite likely, better acquisition outcomes.

3.0 What Are Your Engagement Responsibilities?

Though Defense Acquisition University (DAU) communities do not have a role designated as “Community Manager,” it is a function that must be filled by either the Community Leader or the Moderator (see also [Community Roles and Responsibilities](#)). While acting as a community manager, the job of the CoP Leader and Moderator includes not just community facilitation, but also community engagement. “The community manager is the glue that holds the digital community together; he or she keeps this online space operational and refines it over time, building meaningful relationships with customers in the process” (from “Community Managers Are Your New Key Players” by CX App). The community manager’s job is to create and maintain an environment where members can exchange ideas, ask or answer questions, and share knowledge by doing some or all of the following:

- Serve as a social leader to encourage collaboration among community members.
- Create, facilitate, and/or publicize relevant events to increase community members’ engagement.
- Orient, manage, and continuously engage community members to deepen their sense of community.
- Increase community membership and community engagement.
- Curate and maintain content.
- Actively seek members’ feedback to improve what is offered within the community.
- Utilize metrics to determine community success.
- Institute outreach campaigns (e.g., newsletters and alerts) to increase community awareness and engagement.
- Promote the community on social media.

4.0 What Are Some Quick-Start Engagement Tips?

If you want to engage your community members, then you must be engaged. What does that mean? It means promoting and generating awareness of your community by creating a continuous flow of information from your community to your membership and to the workforce at large. To help you become and/or remain engaged, we suggest the following tips:

- Set alerts for yourself and for your members to be notified of content changes.
- Ensure that all posts are answered quickly.
- Reach out to new members to welcome them to the community.
- Create and/or participate in engagement activities for/within your community.
- Create and maintain a battle rhythm for your community engagement activities (see [How Do You Establish A Battle Rhythm?](#) section below).
- Connect with your members on a regular basis to build a sense of inclusiveness within your community.
- Act as an evangelist for your CoP.

5.0 How Do You Engage Members?

Engaging members is two-fold: first, people must trust those with whom they interact, and second, they must find value in those interactions. Our purpose with this guide is to show how to establish an environment where members can learn about each other and interact both inside and outside of the community (e.g., webinars, symposiums, online discussions, and community sponsored events) to begin to create that sense of community.

Fostering a sense of community takes work and a consistent battle rhythm to create and facilitate online events; promote collaboration between members; moderate, organize, and improve content; and market the community (see also [Community Management Tasks](#)). Cultivating a trusted environment and encouraging members to get involved is critical to advancing member engagement and creating value through that engagement.

- Examples of Engagement Activities (see [Engagement Activities](#) section below)
- Purpose of Engagement Activities
 - Implement a “Targeted” touch to individuals
 - Improve community-wide communication
 - Pull members back into the community
 - Increase participation within the community

6.0 How Do You Establish A Battle Rhythm?

Consistency is key when establishing and implementing your community engagement battle rhythm. As a community leader or moderator, you should be planning activities on a daily, weekly, and monthly basis. [Section 8.0](#) of this guide, though not an exhaustive list, offers a range of activities that can be employed to create value and drive community engagement. To help you manage a consistent battle rhythm, we’ve drafted a sample calendar where you can list your engagement activities, their frequency, and any additional information that you would like to include (see [Calendar of Activities Sample](#) appendix).

Our benchmarking and study of successful communities revealed a clear link between successful communities and the function of a community manager. Community managers (i.e., our Community Leaders and Moderators) function as the heartbeat of the community, creating the battle rhythm and tempo for the community.

An excerpt from “Building Community: A Primer, 2018 Update” by World Bank Group elaborates on this function: “Community managers should use [a] calendar to plan their work and to know exactly what to do day-by-day. It is important that each day, community managers first focus on what they have planned in order to move the community along the planned strategy, and only react to what is going on in the community later. Of course, there can be exceptions, but planned daily tasks should be accomplished every day. ... You can also

plan and allocate your work hours based on your total availability. ... Staging content and engagement helps you spur member participation in the community.”

As an example, if you decide to host monthly webinars, then you need to hold them every month. Your community members will rely on that and will come back to your CoP frequently to check on the webinars; they will also spread the word to their co-workers and peers, encouraging them to attend. Your community membership will grow, the interaction will continue; the new members will spread the word to *their* co-workers and peers, and so forth.

7.0 What Are Expected Engagement Outcomes and Benefits?

In order to understand whether your engagement activities have had an impact, you must first establish a baseline for your community. The baseline establishes your community metrics (e.g., number of members, engagement levels) prior to engagement efforts. Once you’ve established your baseline, then you can start to implement some of your targeted engagement activities. By comparing your baseline metrics to your post-engagement activity metrics, you’ll start to see the results of your efforts. Tracking the engagement activities and your community metrics should indicate which activities are the most successful for your community, allowing you to target those activities that produce the best results. Let this guide you for future activities, but also look at adjusting your methods with the activities that weren’t as successful. Maybe they only require a little tweaking. Following are some outcomes that you can expect to see, as well as some general benefits to your community members from these activities.

Expected Outcomes:

- Increased membership
- Increased community interaction
- Increased sense of community
- Increased networking opportunities

General Benefits to Community Member (see also “Benefits to Signing In” section of the [Governance Summary](#)):

- Increased currency in their field
- Increased awareness of emergent topics and trends
- Increased opportunity to interact with fellow community members

8.0 What Are Examples Of Engagement Activities?

Following is a list of sample activities that you can employ to build engagement within your community. This list is not all-inclusive, but it will help you start to build your battle rhythm on a daily, weekly, or monthly basis. Through benchmarking, we identified these examples as things that other communities are doing to get proven results.

CoP Leaders and Moderators should develop an inventory of topics that they can use for webinars, open-ended discussion posts, and poll questions, to maintain their battle rhythm cadence. They should work with subject matter experts (SMEs) to identify relevant hot topics that would interest their community.

8.1 CoP Hosted Events

Community-hosted webinars are a great way to engage your community members and/or to gain new members by demonstrating the educational value of the community. Several of our communities offer webinars, but DAU also offers Lunch & Learns and the DAU Alumni Association (DAUAA) offers Hot Topic Forums covering a variety of topics. Communities may work with DAU or DAUAA to sponsor or host these types of events, if the topic is relevant to their community members. Also, Webex and other online conferencing tools offer built-in poll functionality; it is a best practice to close a webinar with a poll or quick survey to determine the webinar’s value to the attendees.

Tip: To improve attendance during webinars, recruit SMEs and senior-level people to speak on hot topics that would interest the CoP members.

Modes

- Webinars
- Lunch & Learns
- Hot Topic Forums

Frequency

- Monthly or as applicable

Specific Benefits Related to this Activity

- Target topics that would be beneficial to the community members

Implementation/How To

- Choose an appropriate topic for your community
 - Trending or emergent topics
 - Challenges facing the community or an individual
- Create the presentation or find a speaker
- Advertise appropriately
 - Add information and links under Calendar, Events, and/or Announcements
 - Push emails using community Announcement/Alerts
 - Post on social media
 - Write a blog about it
- Host discussions about the webinar in your CoP and point attendees to the discussion thread
- Document metrics, such as number of attendees and, if possible, how many of the attendees were members vs non-members of your community
- Capture information contained in the webinar's chat window to gain valuable insight on possible future webinar topics or ideas for new discussion threads and curated content within your community
- Gather feedback through Feedback buttons, surveys, or polls on whether the webinar provided useful information, was it helpful for the attendee's job, etc.

Metrics

- Number of participants
 - Existing members vs non-members
- Number of new members who joined following the event
- Number of discussion posts about event
- Number of presentation downloads
- Number of presentation views
- Average rating
- Survey/poll results

8.2 Non-CoP Hosted Events

While not hosted by your community, these events can still provide value to your members and advertising them on your CoP site is another way to keep your members returning to see what's new and to gain new members. Since you would not be hosting the event, you would not be able to use the conferencing site's built-in polling capability, but you could add a poll or start a discussion thread on the webinar's topic on your CoP.

Modes

- Webinars
- Lunch & Learns
- Hot Topic Forums
- Seminars
- Conferences
- Workshops

Frequency

- As applicable

Specific Benefits Related to this Activity

- Make community members aware of events that could be beneficial to them

Implementation/How To

- Advertise appropriately
 - Add information and links under Calendar, Events, and/or Announcements
 - Push emails using community Announcement/Alerts
 - Post on social media
 - Write a blog about it

Metrics

- Number of new members who joined following the event
- Number of discussion posts about event
- Number of Calendar, Events, and/or Announcements views

8.3 Discussions

Open-ended discussions are a great way to get your membership involved in your community (see also [Guidelines for Participating in Share an Idea / Ask the Community \(Discussion Forums\)](#)). They can open the door to increased networking among your members, in addition to improving your CoP engagement metric. Whether you choose to host a discussion related to a new topic or post a question designed to provoke new thoughts about an existing process, discussions are a huge part of the social aspect of a community.

Modes

- Seeded discussion post
- Featured discussion post
- Hosted discussion (e.g., with a SME)
- Event-related discussion (e.g., webinar)

Frequency

- Weekly or as applicable

Specific Benefits Related to this Activity

- Encourage interaction between members
- Share experiences and knowledge
- Ability to ask questions and get timely responses
- Initiate innovative ideas

Implementation/How To

- Post open-ended questions to encourage users to engage with the community by providing feedback and input (e.g., how will <new policy> affect your work?)
- Feature a discussion post to draw attention to it
- Invite your community members to chat with a subject matter expert on a particular topic at a set date/time
- Invite your community members to participate in an event-related discussion

Metrics

- Number of posts
- Number of views

8.4 Work Out Loud

“Work Out Loud” is another type of discussion post that is designed to encourage networking among your members. By tossing out a general question (such as “What are you working on today?”), the idea is to spark some general conversation that will allow your members to become more acquainted with their fellow members, possibly finding related areas of interest. Maybe two members discover that they are both working on the same type of task or issue and are able to help each other, or maybe one had worked on a similar task previously and can offer some best practices or lessons learned to the other.

Modes

- Seeded discussion
- Featured discussion

Frequency

- Weekly or as applicable

Specific Benefits Related to this Activity

- Encourage interaction between members
- Encourage the social aspect of the community
- Improve networking connections
- Increase awareness of commonality of issues being worked on by other community members

Implementation/How To

- Once weekly, throw out the question, "What are you working on today?" (or a similar question)
- Have at least one other user ready to answer the question with something interesting in an effort to jumpstart a discussion or prompt others to post their own tasks
- Facilitate interactions to foster connections between community members

Metrics

- Number of posts
- Number of views

8.5 Student Introduction to CoP

Since many of our Community Leaders and Moderators are also DAU faculty members, it would be relatively easy to create synergy between the community and the related course(s). It could serve as an introduction to the CoP for those students not already familiar with it, and it could serve as a re-introduction for those students who may already be members, drawing them back into the community and making them more engaged.

Tip: Develop course curriculum (both online and resident courses) that include exercises that direct the students to tools or content on the CoP.

Modes

- Pre-Course Communication
- In-Classroom

Frequency

- As applicable

Specific Benefits Related to this Activity

- Makes students aware of the CoP
- Encourages them to join the CoP
- Makes a connection between the CoP and the course content

Implementation/How To

- Email students before the course starts: introduce the instructor and the course-related CoP and include pre-course assignments such as reading an article or watching a video, where that content is hosted on the CoP
- Discuss the benefits of the CoP/joining the CoP in the classroom
- Integrate homework, discussions, workflows, etc., that is hosted in the CoP into the course work

Metrics

- Number of new members
- Number of views

8.6 Student Feedback

Some community leaders already tie their CoPs to the courses that they teach and actively solicit input and feedback from their students on the CoP's content, both what is already there and what they would like to see added. Besides increasing engagement with the students (and community members), it also can lead to improvements in the CoP. An example is to solicit student feedback on what tools are needed, or if a tool is already under development, asking the students to review the tool and submit comments or participate in discussions about it. In either scenario, the community leader can then use that feedback to create or to modify the tool before making it available to the defense acquisition workforce.

Frequency

- As applicable

Specific Benefits Related to this Activity

- Makes a connection between community tools and the course content
- Receive feedback/input about tools from the students

Implementation/How To

- Load tools, checklists, documents, etc. to the CoP
- Ask students to review materials, rate them, and provide feedback through the community (e.g., discussion thread)

Metrics

- Number of students participating
- Number of feedback responses
- Number of views
- Average rating

8.7 Newsletters

Creating a newsletter is an efficient way to communicate with your community members, allowing you to send them the latest information, notify them of unanswered or timely discussion threads, and generally bring them up-to-date with happenings within your CoP.

We've identified several best practices related to distributing a newsletter: 1) hosting the newsletter on your CoP, 2) adding an Announcement advertising the latest edition of the newsletter, 3) include a synopsis in the Announcement of the contents with links back to the CoP, and 3) setting up a push Alert to all community members that is triggered when an Announcement is added (see additional information in [Section 8.9](#)).

Adding the Announcement triggers the Alert function to send the email notification to all community members. This serves to increase engagement by pulling your members back into the community to view content, respond to questions/discussions, and interact with their fellow community members.

Tip: Community newsletters could also be sent to non-members by copying the Announcement text into an email and sending it to course alumni and targeted workforce members. This could lead to increased membership and engagement for your community.

Frequency

- Weekly, monthly, or as applicable

Specific Benefits Related to this Activity

- Increase awareness of key activities within the CoP
- Drive members back to the CoP using links to content

Implementation/How To

Create newsletter and post as Word or PDF document on your CoP ([example on Munitions and Explosives Safety CoP](#))

Create an Announcement that provides a synopsis of the newsletter's contents and hyperlink to the newsletter ([example on Munitions and Explosives Safety CoP](#))

Push the Announcement to your community members by using the Alert function to send an email to your community members

Metrics

- Number of views
- Average rating

8.8 New Member Welcome Emails

New members should be acknowledged and welcomed to the community, and one of the best ways to do that is to send a "welcome" email. Community leaders can customize our standard welcome email text to identify more closely with their own community, drawing the new member's attention to key areas within that CoP, etc. Until we have a workflow that allows for instantaneous, automatic generation of the welcome email, the leader/community manager should conduct weekly checks for new members and manually send the welcome email to them.

Frequency

- Ideally, as soon as they join but at least weekly

Specific Benefits Related to this Activity

- Welcomes the new member to the CoP
- Encourages participation
- Increases participation by engaging new members early

Implementation/How To

- Draft a welcome email introducing the CoP and its leaders and asking new members to introduce themselves to the community, to contribute content, and to participate in discussions
- Seed discussion threads for "introduce yourself" and "what's missing"
- Send welcome email to new members

Metrics

- Number of emails sent
- Number of new member responses to "introduce yourself" question
- Number of new member responses to "what's missing" question

8.9 Push Announcements/Alerts

When you have something timely or important to impart to your community members, you may do so by posting an announcement. Assuming that you have first set up alerts for your community members (contact cop@dau.mil for the needed permissions and training to do this), they will receive an alert every time that you add an announcement. Be sure to include a link back to the relevant document, etc., within the body of your announcement to draw your community members back to your community. Your community should serve "as a hub for communications, which works to draw users back into the fold through notifications, alerts and personalization" (from "Community Software Is Not Dead" by CS App).

Frequency

- As applicable

Specific Benefits Related to this Activity

- Communicates important information to your community members in a timely fashion
- Drives people to your community (use links back to content or discussions)

Implementation/How To

