



Erin Conn
Community Engagement Manager
SEA Change

- DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION
- INTERDISCIPLINARY
- SCIENTIFIC SOCIETY

“Communities remind us that we are all just humans seeking answers to complex problems, and that our solutions to those problems are ultimately meant to serve humanity.”

COULD YOU INTRODUCE YOURSELF TO OUR READERS? TELL US A LITTLE BIT ABOUT YOURSELF AND THE COMMUNITY YOU MANAGE.

Hi everyone! My name is Erin Conn (she/her) and I am the Community Engagement Manager for [SEA Change](#) at the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS). SEA Change stands for STEMM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics, and Medicine) Equity Achievement Change. This initiative supports colleges and universities as they undertake systemic transformation to advance diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) on their campuses.

The [SEA Change Community](#) is a publicly accessible forum where anybody can share news and resources about DEI in STEMM higher education. The community is also an organizing hub for SEA Change Member institutions as they work together to prepare for the [SEA Change Awards](#), which recognize their efforts to create lasting systemic change.

WHAT WAS YOUR PATH TO SCIENTIFIC COMMUNITY MANAGEMENT? WERE YOU TRAINED AS A SCIENTIST OR DID YOU COME BY ANOTHER ROUTE?

I earned my PhD in cell biology and my dissertation focused on chemotherapy development. During grad school, I realized my passion for organizing around issues of DEI. I founded the first DEI-focused STEMM graduate student group at Georgetown University, and the work I did with that group got me hooked on community engagement.

The values and principles of SEA Change aligned well with mine, and I was thrilled to join AAAS in 2019 and begin developing the SEA Change Community from the ground up. I initially started out as a Program Associate, managing events logistics, communications, and general support. By February, 2021, the responsibilities related to our community had grown enough to warrant a full-time Community Engagement Manager, and that's when I took on the role.

CAN YOU DESCRIBE THE KEY RESPONSIBILITIES OF YOUR ROLE? HOW DO YOU TYPICALLY SPEND YOUR TIME?

My core responsibilities include:

- Managing behind-the-scenes technical aspects of the community in Salesforce, a customer relationship management system with a community platform, including daily data management.
- Developing community content including interviews of our members, articles highlighting our members' recent achievements, and posts on our social media accounts.
- Onboarding and managing our volunteer community guides (see below).
- Compiling community metrics and reporting back to AAAS leadership.
- Attending and writing recaps of member and institute events to share with those respective groups.

LOOKING BACK ON THE LAST YEAR, WHAT HAS BEEN YOUR FAVORITE PROJECT YOU'VE WORKED ON?

I am incredibly proud of creating a Community Design and Engagement Plan from scratch using the skills I learned from two CSCCE courses: [Community Engagement Fundamentals](#) and [Nurturing Online Communities](#). The Design and Engagement Plan defines the goals of the community, and describes the community structure and content that will lead the community to achieving those goals. As we implement the plan, I'm excited to see what works well and what can be improved so we can continue to evolve our strategies to best serve our community.

This past month as part of our ongoing engagement plan, we released an interview by SEA Change Director Dr. Shirley Malcom, in which she speaks with Dr. Aileen Fernandez, who is a postdoc at Yale. In the interview, they discussed the experiences they've shared as Black women in STEMM despite the decades that separate them in age. It really shines a light on how little has changed and how much farther we need to go. It was an honor to be able to work with them, and I'm looking forward to continuing to elevate the voices of folks who are actively working to make STEMM more equitable and inclusive.



KEY

- INTERPERSONAL
- PROGRAM MANAGEMENT
- PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT
- COMMUNICATION
- TECHNICAL



ERIN'S SKILLS WHEEL SIGNATURE

The CSCCE skills wheel is composed of five core competencies, with nine skills within each competency. Skills wheels are a common way of visualizing and curating information about skills that also allow for the creation of a job "signature" or "fingerprint" based on the particular skills in use. This wheel is representative of the skills Erin used over the last 12 months.

► For more information, see [the CSCCE skills wheel](#).

DO YOU SHARE COMMUNITY MANAGEMENT DUTIES WITH ANYONE ELSE? WHERE DOES YOUR POSITION FIT WITHIN YOUR ORGANIZATION?

I manage everything related to the community on my own. The SEA Change team consists of seven people total. Three of my colleagues are responsible for managing the other functional parts of the initiative (institutional [awards & membership](#), [biomedicine](#), and the [institute](#)). We work together to align the activities of our respective domains of SEA Change (e.g., each institute course has a related community group). We are also very lucky to have a full time Salesforce administrator who helps us develop and maintain the technical infrastructure that supports our business processes. We collectively review our performance metrics and short-, medium-, and long-term goals for outputs and outcomes of the initiative with our director, Dr. Shirley Malcom, and Dr. Travis York, who is the director of the department in which SEA Change lives at AAAS: [Inclusive STEM Ecosystems for Equity and Diversity](#).

WHAT DO YOU LIKE MOST ABOUT BEING A COMMUNITY MANAGER?

I love having the opportunity to connect with our community members and support them on their DEI journeys. I am very motivated by supporting others in their work, and working with the SEA Change Community allows me to do that while also advancing our mission to drive systemic transformation within academia.

WHAT IS THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE YOU HAVE FACED AS A SCIENTIFIC COMMUNITY MANAGER? ARE THERE WAYS IN WHICH YOUR ROLE COULD BE MADE EASIER – SUCH AS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES OR SOMETHING ELSE?

Having the opportunity to participate in CSCCE courses for professional development has made a world of difference. At this point, what would support the growth of the SEA Change Community the most would be an expanded community management team. I find that a lot of my time and brain space is occupied by the day-to-day maintenance tasks and content production. It would be wonderful to have another community manager to collaborate with and help guide the community's Design and Engagement Plan as the community evolves.

AND ZOOMING OUT A LITTLE, WHY DO YOU THINK COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IS IMPORTANT TO SCIENCE? HOW HAVE YOU SEEN ACTIVE MANAGEMENT IMPROVE YOUR COMMUNITY?

Science thrives on collaboration, and creating communities that help facilitate that collaboration is so important to helping the field move forward. Science doesn't happen in a vacuum and it isn't done by robots (at least not all the time). I think it's incredibly important that we lean into the human aspect of STEMM. Communities remind us that we are all just humans seeking answers to complex problems, and that our solutions to those problems are ultimately meant to serve humanity.

Particularly within the DEI space, I've noticed that many people try to view their efforts completely objectively. SEA Change approaches institutional transformation in a methodical and data-driven way, but it's also important to have feelings and opinions about the outcomes of this work. My hope is that we're building a community that affirms and normalizes the difficult emotional experiences that can come along with doing DEI work. Incorporating this human element into our community content is a form of active community management that I hope will serve the entire scientific community.

Last updated March 2022



This case study is part of a series created by the Center for Scientific Collaboration and Community Engagement.

Cite this case study as: Center for Scientific Collaboration and Community Engagement (2022) CSCCE Community Manager Case Study: Erin Conn. Conn, Pratt, Sidik, and Woodley doi: [10.5281/zenodo.6348081](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.6348081)