CSCCE

The house party metaphor for community management

Essays and reflection questions to unlock your community programming through metaphor

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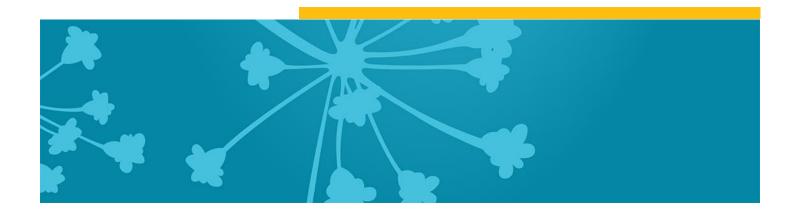
Table of Contents

About this booklet

While every community has its own nuanced context, there are many recurring themes in community management that can be helpful to discuss with others. One tool to support those conversations is the use of metaphors.

In our experience, using metaphors opens the door to more free-flowing discussion. The familiar terms of party planning, for example, allow us to move beyond the minutiae of our current situations and explore ideas and connections that are only obvious in the context of the metaphor. And then, we can take those ideas back to our work as community managers, knowing that they are based on a shared, if only tangentially related, experience.

This is the first of three booklets we are releasing in 2023/24, each of which consists of several parts where we set up a metaphor and then go deeper into some of the community management challenges that the metaphor is best placed to unpack, with some reflections questions to support you at the end of each section. Feel free to skip ahead to the part that most interests you – they largely stand-alone. Each series of essays was originally posted on the CSCCE blog, and then discussed at one of our monthly community calls. If you have any feedback, or would like to let us know how you've been using metaphors to guide your work, please email us: info@cscce.org. We'd love to hear from you!

About CSCCE

The Center for Scientific Collaboration and Community Engagement (CSCCE) champions the importance of human infrastructure for effective collaboration in STEM. We provide training and support for the people who make scientific collaborations succeed at scale - and we research the impact of these emerging roles. You can find more about our work on our website, or send inquiries to info@cscce.org.

3

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Part one: Introducing the house party metaphor

Introducing the house party metaphor for community management

The house party metaphor helps you think through your community venue, how your members interact, and how you as community manager (or party host!) can facilitate those interactions.
Image by [Freepik](#)

We often use the metaphor of a house party to explain community management and to work through some of the challenges in a relatable way. In our [2022 guidebook on creating community scaffolding](#), we described it like this:

> You, the community manager, are hosting a house party (aka supporting members on your community platform). It is your job to ensure that all the guests at the party enjoy themselves – in a way that is inclusive, safe, and respects the neighbors! This starts with the invitation (onboarding), which should be clear and engaging and include information about expectations and norms (community participation guidelines). You may also require an RSVP to your invite that includes learning more about your invitees' needs (onboarding survey).
>
> At your party, you might welcome your guests at the door and introduce them to others (onboarding and initial welcome) or you might ask other guests to take turns doing this. Later, you might invite your guests to take part in a game or to play their favorite song

(programming), which helps them get to know one another and start identifying shared interests. You will probably also offer refreshments and mingle with your guests yourself (informal coffee chats). And after your party ends, you might check in with your guests about whether they had fun or not (a community survey).

Reference: Center for Scientific Collaboration and Community Engagement. (2022) The CSCCE Community Participation Model – Scaffolding to lower barriers to participation in STEM communities. Woodley, Pratt, and Santistevan doi: 10.5281/zenodo.6078934

The house party metaphor is particularly useful for thinking through the role of scaffolding, as we did in the guidebook, describing the configuration of your community (i.e., what rooms it contains), and determining what happens when something goes awry and you have to respond to a challenging situation.

Metaphor components

THE HOUSE

The house represents the space in which your community convenes. For some communities, it's obvious what the house represents – an online platform, for example, or a university department. For others, it's a little more amorphous, with the house representing a collection of social media channels plus an in-person conference.

Features of the house that might relate to how you think about community:

- **Owned, rented, or a cooperative** – who owns your community space? Is it something administered by a larger organization with the community manager a property manager of sorts, bridging between members (fee-paying tenants) and the "owner"? Or perhaps the community is more distributed and co-owned by all members.
- **Windows and doors** – how open is your community? Can people who aren't members "see in" and observe what's happening inside? Are the doors unlocked or left ajar so that new members can easily enter or is some kind of key required – whether that's paying a fee, asking for a front door key, or showing an ID?
- **Utilities** – what services are needed to keep your community up and running? How are these paid for and who is responsible for managing them? What happens when those services e.g., technology tools, change their terms?
- **Location** – how easy is it for people to find your community? Is it located near other related communities on the same street? Does it have any adjoining buildings? What is your relationship with the neighbors like?

THE ROOMS

A house often has multiple rooms, each with a distinct purpose. For example, the kitchen is where you prepare food, or the bedroom is where you sleep. But sometimes you don't eat in the dining room, and instead take your dinner onto the couch so you can read or watch TV. And maybe at

7

different times of year, you spend more time outside.

Features of rooms that might relate to how you think about community:

- **Walls and doors** – once participants are inside the house, are all the areas of your community open to everyone? If not, how do you decide who can enter different rooms and how do you monitor or administer their access? E.g., do maintainers go through training before they are able to access the "heating, electrics, and water supply" of your community?
- **Furniture and appliances** – how does the functionality of your community spaces impact what happens there? Are you providing appealing and accessible decor (pinning posts, having a consistent style, designing for screen reader compatibility or including captions)?
- **Sharing what's happening in the rooms** – how do you share what's happening in different parts of your community with your broader membership (if at all)? If you miss the cool conversation happening in the kitchen, how might you hear about it in the living room? And what about the hallways, staircases, and other spaces that connect various parts of your house? How do you support members in moving from those interstitial spaces (such as newsfeeds in an online community) into a room where they feel like they belong (e.g., by joining a working group or task force)?

THE PARTY

You have a house, with several rooms, to which you invite your guests. The party is the programming that facilitates connections between members. It might be the same every day, it might change with the seasons or to coincide with other events happening in the neighborhood, or you might run a combination of events and activities.

Features of parties that might relate to how you think about community:

- **Invitations and introductions** – who is in your community, or who do you want to connect your existing members with as you grow?
- **Different things to do** – is your programming multi-modal? Can attendees choose between getting something to eat (CONVEY/CONSUME), making a meal together (CONTRIBUTE), playing a game (COLLABORATE), or planning a future activity (CO-CREATE)? Are you offering different ways for your guests to interact or participate? [See the CSCCE Community Participation Model for more details about these various modes of participation.]
- **Etiquette and norms** – how do your members know the expected behaviors in your community? And do they know what to do if someone does something wrong? Is this shared with the initial invitation – and/or reinforced when they show up?
- **Endings/outcomes** – while your community is unlikely to "end," and so you're likely to continue to host different parties, what will come out of your programming and convening for any specific party? Are there publications or reports about what the community is doing? Do you send around thank you notes to guests for their contributions?

THE HOST

It is rare for a party to just happen, and the same is true of communities. In this metaphor, the role of the host is generally played by the community manager, who may also be supported by other members of staff or community volunteers.

Features of hosts that might relate to how you think about community:

- **Knowledgeable about their guests** – do you know who your members are? Can you make introductions when they arrive or highlight relevant programming happening in the different rooms?
- **Listen and learn** – do your community members have adequate avenues for providing feedback? And can you act on feedback you receive?
- **Create a welcoming environment** – are you clearing away empty glasses and plates (dealing with spam and inappropriate content), are all of your rooms accessible to all guests? How are you checking whether refreshments need refilling (replying to unanswered discussion threads, starting new conversations and making further introductions)?
- **Mediate conflict** – how will you moderate disagreements or transgressions?

Reflection questions

1. **What's something you've experienced at a party or other gathering that was memorable (positive or negative)?**
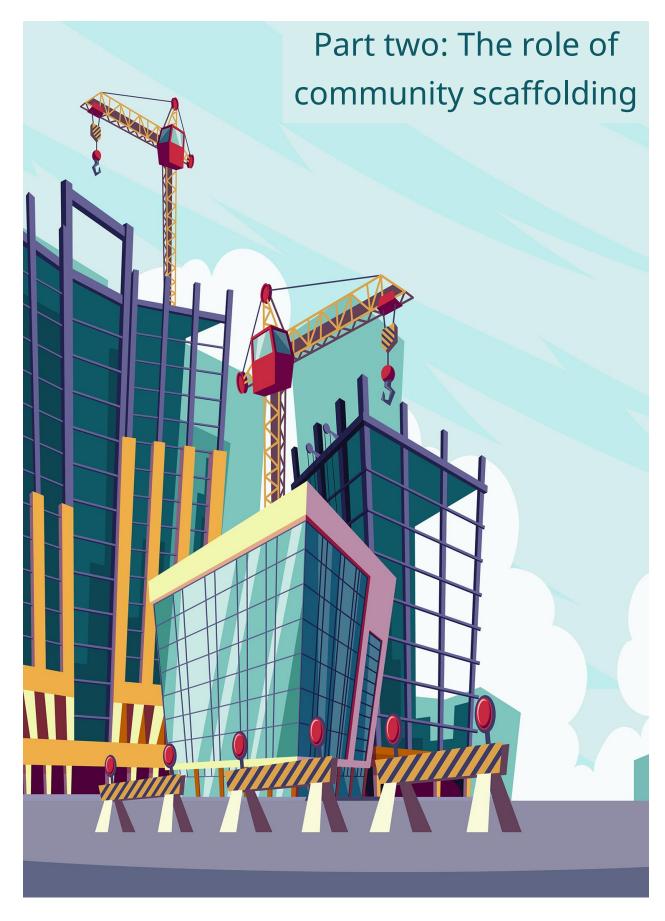
   E.g., My favorite kinds of parties are potlucks involving food - as long as guests are clear about any dietary restrictions this creates a fun sense of surprise AND community.

2. **Which bits of the metaphor resonate with you? Are there any that don't make sense?**

   E.g., I don't think we have a house - our members are kind of nomadic and meet at various conferences - maybe like having tents they take around and host transient events in. I feel a bit like the person who runs the outdoor store making sure they have all the equipment they need (repairing their tents, providing a new stove or backpack, and sometimes marshmallows!)

3. **Can you think of a challenge or situation in your own community that you could describe using the metaphor?**

   E.g., We're really good at welcoming people at the from door, but once they're in the house we kind of expect them to wander around until they find something. I think we could use some more signage that directs people from room to room or a buddy system in the form of a champions program.

Part two: The role of community scaffolding

Community scaffolding – what is it and why does it matter?

Scaffolding supports your community by removing barriers to participation – without it, your community and its activities would still be there, but they might not go as well as you'd hoped.
Image by vectorpocket on Freepik

> "The best house parties seem to happen seamlessly – the refreshments are replenished before you realize they have run low, the activities are engaging but not overwhelming, you meet a lot of interesting people, you feel safe and welcome in the space – and you can even find key facilities such as the restrooms! This is very likely because your host put a lot of thought into all the supporting structures ahead of time – what we refer to as scaffolding."

Reference: *Center for Scientific Collaboration and Community Engagement. (2022) The CSCCE Community Participation Model – Scaffolding to lower barriers to participation in STEM communities. Woodley, Pratt, and Santistevan doi: 10.5281/zenodo.6078934*

Scaffolding is "the supportive information, activities, and processes that address barriers to member participation and ensure that all members can access and engage in community programming" (see our guidebook for more details).

In the house party metaphor, scaffolding might include:

- requesting information about dietary restrictions as part of the RSVP process
- providing information related to accessibility such as parking availability, access to elevators

- placing balloons outside the door to indicate that the guests are in the correct location
- creating name badges for attendees with options for them to self-disclose pronouns or other personal information
- greeting guests at the door and introducing them to at least one other attendee they don't already know
- adding a sign on the wall indicating the location of the toilets
- posting food allergy information next to items at the buffet

Each of these examples serves to make it easier, safer, and more comfortable for all attendees to get what they need while attending the event – whether that's avoiding food that might make them sick, feeling reassured that they're in the right place, or easily meeting others that they don't yet know without feeling isolated or awkward.

Another way of thinking about scaffolding at a party is that it enables guests to get what they need more independently from the host while the event is in place. If you can find your own way to the restrooms, then the host is free to lead a toast or introduce a game.

Examples of community scaffolding

While every community is different, there are some key places in the lifecycle of a community and your members' experiences where scaffolding is particularly important:

- **Onboarding new members** – In the metaphor, this is how you welcome your guests to the party. Community onboarding scaffolding might look like tip sheets or welcome videos that orient a new member to the platform you use to connect, a community directory or welcome thread so that they can find out more about other members, or the offer of a coffee chat to help them get started.
- **Setting expectations and resolving conflict** – For everyone to have a good time at the party, they all need to agree on what it means to behave appropriately in the house. Putting in place community participation guidelines or a code of conduct, and making clear the process for addressing any violations, is a key piece of scaffolding for any community, which we'll talk about in the final section of this booklet.
- **Supporting the growth of your community** – As more people show up to the party, you'll need to rely on your guests to help make them feel welcome. Creating resources that help your members explain the goals and norms of your community, like a one-pager or brochure, and then making sure they can find them by posting them on your website or on your community platform, is one way of supporting these "community champions."

Getting support with creating your scaffolding

One truth about scaffolding is that it may involve significant "less visible labor" on the part of the host. The signs and other thoughtful touches at the party are great – but how many attendees think about what it took to make them? That extra work, combined with the lack of appreciation, can lead a host to burn out over time – especially when the size of the party grows as word-of-mouth spreads about how great the events are.

A growing community can also mean that the host doesn't have time to connect in any meaningful way as new members may arrive with friends who are existing members and bypass being met at the front door. The host may consequently both miss the excitement of meeting new people AND have to contend with inadequate onboarding of new arrivals, resulting in confusion and lots of spontaneous questions that could have been addressed during onboarding.

So, while this growth in the number of attendees may be generally desirable, it creates a need to share the load of providing the scaffolding with those who are spreading the word about the party. This could look like assigning specific roles – as greeters or room hosts – and providing the accompanying training so that they can, for example, work the music system or oven, depending on the room they're in. This is where a champions program can help – with the added impact of reducing burnout in the host, in addition to ensuring the growing number of guests continue to know how and where they can join in with the party activities.

When should you create community scaffolding?

Creating a lot of scaffolding all at once can sound intimidating, and may not be necessary. Typically, the best places to start are areas where you know there's a crucial need, e.g., addressing expectations about behavior (creating community participation guidelines) and making members feel safe.

You'll likely also find that needs for new scaffolding arise organically. In the metaphor, imagine that a guest points out that the latest group to arrive brought pizza. That was super generous of them, but they didn't make clear which pizza had meat and which was vegetarian. This might prompt you as the host to have a quiet word with the pizza bearers, encouraging them to share the food info. As a community manager, that could look like creating guidelines and/or templates for how you expect sub-groups to convene. You're not trying to quash the organic enthusiasm and activities, but you are thinking about how to instill the notion of community care and distribute the tasks associated with caring for one another.

How do you know if it's time to take down old scaffolding, or put up something new?

Some scaffolding is evergreen, some will need to be updated over time. For example, if you've created a tip sheet to help your members navigate your community platform, you'll need to note whether any technical updates to the platform impact its contents.

You can also track usage or download metrics of your scaffolding and see if your members are using it. If not, maybe it's time to retire or rethink the purpose of that particular piece of scaffolding.

Additional reading / Resources

- Center for Scientific Collaboration and Community Engagement. (2022) The CSCCE Community Participation Model – Scaffolding to lower barriers to participation in STEM communities. Woodley, Pratt, and Santistevan doi: [10.5281/zenodo.6078934](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.6078934)

- The Value of #Welcome, part 1 – In this blog post, Stefanie Butland talks about the importance of extending a personal welcome to new community members.
- The Value of #Welcome, part 2: How to prepare 40 new community members for an unconference – And in this follow-up post, Stefanie Butland describes the scaffolding she created for contributors to an annual unconference.
- CSCCE's Community Participation Guidelines now available – In this blog post, the members of a CSCCE Working Group describe how they co-created a set of Core Values Statements and ultimately CSCCE's Community Participation Guidelines.

Reflection questions

1. **What scaffolding do you provide to help members know what to expect in your community?**

   E.g., An invitation with clear information about what food to bring (if any), the date and time of party, and what things to expect (e.g., we'll provide the cake).

2. **What scaffolding do you provide or might you need in order to support needs around technology?**

   E.g., Posted directions to the elevator, information about parking meters, and links to online maps to get to the house.

3. **How do you support guests in feeling like they belong and can express different aspects of who they are?**

   E.g., Offering different activities in different rooms or introducing them to someone with overlapping interests early-on in the party.

Part three: Exploring community configuration

Community configuration: Windows, doors, rooms and more!

You can think of your community as a collection of rooms – each with a distinct purpose, collection of appliances, or design aesthetic.
Image by pikisuperstar on Freepik

So, thanks to the deployment of some strategic scaffolding, you've been able to welcome folks to your house party – and hopefully they've navigated from room to room and discovered something that appeals to them, persuading them to return again and again! Now's a great time to take a step back and consider what the way your house is structured means for you, your members, and the day-to-day upkeep of your shared space.

How many rooms do you have, and what's going on in them?

In the house party metaphor, rooms can represent a couple of different things. How you decide to use the metaphor is up to you, but here are our suggestions:

- **Rooms as member types** – While your community is bound by a shared purpose or goal, chances are there are sizeable groups of people who do similar work or contribute specific skills. There might be developers, maintainers, and users. Or faculty, post-docs, and early career researchers. Or biologists, physicists, and chemists.

16

- **Rooms as special interest groups** – This is subtly different from the first option here, and sub-divides your community by member interests. For example, some faculty members, some post-docs, and some early career researchers are particularly interested in exploring open science practices or online tools for collaboration.

- **Rooms as different community spaces** – For some communities, being part of a community offers access to tools or resources within the house. Maybe each of your rooms houses a different software package, or a collection of documents your members need access to from time to time.

- **Rooms as community projects** – For groups that are particularly interested in producing things, their rooms might be outfitted with the specific hardware and their bookshelves stocked with specific reading matter (e.g., a kitchen with an oven, refrigerator, and a collection of cookbooks is ready for making a meal), so that the people in that room can create something together.

Regardless of how you decide to use your rooms, taking the time to define them will undoubtedly make you a better host. Afterall, as new members arrive, wouldn't it be great to suggest a room or two to head to first?

Connecting your rooms (or not)

WINDOWS AND DOORS

Depending on how you've constructed your house, it's possible that anyone and everyone can look into your rooms and see what's going on. But you might have added some blinds in a couple of rooms for privacy, and maybe installed some locks on the doors. These choices have important implications.

- **All your doors are open, all your windows are unobstructed** – That anyone and everyone can access your house is great if you have the resources to safely support them while they're there. However, do you really want everyone to see all the mess in the kitchen or simply enjoy the food in the dining room? And what about guests who need some quiet time every now and then to stay engaged?

- **All your doors are locked and the blinds are drawn** – Assuming you've given the key to the house to a managed list of guests, and you're not interested in attracting new folks who might be walking by and looking through your windows, this might be a great option. But what if someone loses their key, or prefers to move outdoors and engage more freely with others on the street?

- **Some of the doors are locked, and blinds are installed but rarely used** – A combination of the two approaches described above is often the way to go, but that requires intentional consideration of what belongs behind a locked door and what belongs in the sunroom – and making sure guests are in alignment about that.

HALLWAYS AND STAIRWELLS/LIFT SHAFTS

Within your house, guests can move from room to room via hallways and stairs/elevators. In a community, this might represent accessing different channels on your community platforms, or participating in multiple special interest groups. How they get from room-to-room matters – are all your members able to navigate stairs, for example? Or are the hallways dark and in need of better illumination?

As a community manager, how quiet or packed each of your rooms is might be telling you something about how easy they are to find and whether you need to add some signage, switch on some lights, or install an elevator.

OUTCOMES AND OUTPUTS

If your rooms are being used to make things, whether those things are for your guests (e.g., a birthday cake being baked in the kitchen) or for people outside the house (e.g., a community newsletter), you'll need to think carefully about how you broadcast that those products are ready. Maybe your party is small enough that you can carry the cake into the living room covered in candles (e.g., your post in the community Slack channel will reach everyone), but for a large party it might need to be divided up in the kitchen, with willing volunteers helping you distribute it around the house (e.g., you equip members with slides about the community so that they can share out at large conferences).

Even if all your doors are locked and the blinds are drawn, yours is not the only house on the block! If the things that are leaving the house (music, enticing smells; aka materials and word of mouth testimonials) are routinely enticing, others in the neighborhood are going to get curious. In the metaphor, your neighbors might represent potential collaborators, funders, or even competitors. Thinking about when and how you might invite them in, or meet in a common space such as the park, can be one step towards building neighborly relationships.

Additional reading / Resources

CSCCE Community Profiles – In each of these infographic-style resources, you'll find descriptions and depictions of different types of community structures – and yes, we can make one for your community, too! Email info@cscce.org if you're interested in learning more.

Reflection questions

1. **What "rooms" do you have in your community, if any? Are you coordinating a multi-room home or a studio?**

   E.g., We have three massive rooms and then a bunch of much smaller rooms, all arranged around a central "fireplace." I worry that the big rooms use up most of the heat...

2. Are there any rooms that have restricted access - or any entry requirements to join the party?

E.g., We typically think of the kitchen as where the core team works - we prep the food and drink, we tidy up - and we don't always want those aspects to visible to new guests especially. Practically speaking, the Github repos where we plan are private.

3. Is one host enough for the size of your house / the party? Do you need champions to help in different rooms?

E.g., Currently, I know what's going on in all of the rooms of my house, but we have plans to put an extension off the kitchen next year (by creating a community council of champions to help with some of the community maintenance tasks), so I can see that that's going to change.

4. What do your hallways look like? How about the kitchen? (food, drink, cleaning up)

E.g., The entryway has a lot of signage, but the further you get from the front door, the sparser it becomes...as guests try to navigate the house they might start to feel lost.

5. When might you need to size up or downsize your home? What impacts might this have elsewhere in the neighborhood?

E.g., The main room of the house is no longer big enough for everyone to comfortably convene, and those with the loudest voices are dominating the conversation. I can see that we need to add more structure to our house, and we have considered adding a sunroom on the back of the house as an event space for summer activities. However, our neighbor already has a beautiful sunroom and would be happy to co-host some events with us.

Part four: Community participation guidelines

Community participation guidelines – through the lens of the house party metaphor

Sometimes, things go wrong at house parties. Setting expectations upfront via community participation guidelines can support you as you mediate conflict and find resolutions in keeping with your community's values.
Image by pikisuperstar on Freepik

What happens when something unpleasant happens at your house party? Maybe one of your guests takes over the sound system, and your other guests start leaving because the music is now too loud or not to their taste. Or perhaps a group of friends sets up a game in the kitchen, but they don't invite any of the other guests to play and they're making it hard for folks to access food and beverages.

As host, it's your responsibility to not only handle these situations in the moment, but also communicate ahead of time how you expect your guests to behave towards one another in the shared spaces in which they meet. In this final section, we take a look at the importance of community participation guidelines (aka codes of conduct or codes of behavior) to maintaining a community space where all your members feel welcome and supported.

Why have community participation guidelines?

There are many compelling reasons for compiling community participation guidelines (CPGs), and making these before your house parties become well established — it's harder to course-correct than to outline expectations up front. CPGs primarily exist to protect community members from the harm

that can be caused by the negative behaviors of other members of the community. This is especially important for members who may be part of a minoritized or underrepresented group.

CPGs also exist to set expectations and norms, and support you as community manager when a transgression occurs – you have a record of what a member agreed to abide by when they joined your community, which gives you something to refer back to in any subsequent conversations. Thinking through your potential responses to reports also underscores the importance of including enough detail in your CPGs about expected and unacceptable behaviors, and where your guidelines apply, rather than optimistically relying on individuals "knowing how to behave" and intuiting "the etiquette is around here."

> "In the explicitness…of these rules was a hint of what they were really about: replacing the passive-aggressive, exclusionary, glacially conservative commandments of etiquette with something more…democratic." - Priya Parker, The Art of Gathering

What belongs in a CoC – and what should you call it?

Per Aurora and Gardiner, a Code of Conduct or set of Community Participation Guidelines should contain (in roughly this order):

- Optionally, a short statement describing the goal of the code of conduct
- A list of unacceptable behaviors
- A description of where the code of conduct applies
- A list of potential consequences for violating the code of conduct
- Detailed, specific, simple instructions for reporting a code of conduct violation
- A list of the people who will handle the code of conduct report
- A promise that anyone directly involved in a report will recuse themselves
- Optionally, contact information for emergency services
- Optionally, links to related documents

Where do your community participation guidelines apply?

Let's go back to the metaphor. Imagine some of your guests drink a little too much and get into a fight. It starts in the living room, and you ask them to take it outside. Instead of cooling off, they continue to brawl, waking your neighbors and damaging one of your guests' cars.

Now what? Are these rowdy members beholden to your CPGs even though the damage they did was outside the house (i.e., technically outside your community but still in a place where some of your collaborators and members are also present)? You provided the space to convene and the refreshments that may have fueled the situation. Plus, you like your neighbors and you enjoy volunteering with them at the local food pantry. It's clear that you will need to do something, but what?

This metaphorical situation can and does play out in communities, especially those that overlap and share common members, and it presents a real challenge to mediate and resolve. Banning a member from your community is an option, but are you then obligated to tell community managers at related organizations about the situation?

And what about the people involved in the fight? Who started it? Did they both contravene your CPGs in the same way? Do they deserve to be banned from every community they've ever been part of?

Where to start – adapting existing community participation guidelines

Okay, so you know you need CPGs, but it can feel intimidating to start writing them. Good news: a lot of organizations publish their CPGs under Creative Commons licenses that mean they can be adapted and re-mixed, usually with attribution. Here are some examples:

- Mozilla
- Django
- Dryad
- CSCCE

We strongly suggest, however, that before you adapt a set of CPGs, you consider developing a set of guiding principles, or core values, that are specific to your organization. We've created a worksheet to guide you through this process, which you can download here. It is often by understanding the nuance of your values that you are able to identify what approach your CPGs should take, such as how much you might invest in restorative approaches and which, if any, violations have a non-negotiable, specific consequence, such as a ban.

Socializing your code of conduct

An important function of your community participation guidelines is to educate your members as to what behaviors are acceptable in your community. What may seem like common sense to you might surprise a new member who is used to a different set of norms and behaviors. But how do you share and socialize a code of conduct?

Thinking back to the house party metaphor, you have multiple opportunities to set expectations, including sending out details with the initial invites, considering what happens when someone arrives at the party, and maybe even creating scaffolding that reinforces specific relevant behaviors (signs on the fridge to put empties in the recycling; or by the door to the garden to remind guests not to disturb the neighbors if they go outside).

At CSCCE, we started earlier in the process by inviting members to shape our guidelines with us. Following several months of collaborative work with a working group of members, we hosted a community call about our new core values and community participation guidelines (CPGs), which included collaborative activities to suggest examples of positive and negative behaviors for each of

the core values. We also highlight the existence of our values and CPGs regularly – for example, they are always linked from our community call shared notes docs, included in introductory slide decks, and are part of the onboarding process for our online trainings.

However you decide to socialize your code of conduct, keep in mind its educational function – it's OK for folks to ask questions, and answering them is an opportunity to explore together what the messy reality of implementation can look like.

Responding to reports of misconduct

Community participation guidelines are only half of the matter. Your community members not only need to know what expected and tolerated behavior is, but also what to do if someone ignores those expectations and causes harm.

Thinking about things that might arise at a house party – would you feel comfortable going directly to the host and naming a problem that involved a popular or well-known guest? What would it take for you to feel safe staying at a party where someone was behaving poorly? And what about if you see opportunities for improvements that no one else has noticed – such as pointing out that those sandwiches aren't going to work for vegetarians or there aren't many non-alcoholic drink options.

Reporting guidelines

There are a number of considerations to think through here, and chances are you'll need to create your own "best" version of how to welcome, review, and respond to violations. As we were working through our own process at CSCCE, here are some of the things that came up for us.

- **Anonymous reporting via an online form** – this is a great choice if your primary concern is protecting the person who was harmed. Identifying themselves in the reporting process might make them vulnerable to future incidents, or otherwise damage their mental health or professional reputation. However, it does make it more challenging to verify the report and also ensure that the person reporting the violation knows what you have done to resolve the situation.
- **Setting up an email address for reporting purposes** – this option means that you can set up a communications channel that is not one-to-one, which ensures accountability for a swift response to any reports. However, with this option it is important to make clear who has access to messages sent to that account.
- **Offering multiple reporting options** – ultimately, this is what we decided to do. We created a form that can be completed anonymously, with the option to self-identify. The form is first received by the CSCCE staff who serve on our CoC committee, and then shared with the other members, so reporters can indicate if they would prefer it go no further.

Reporting committee

Ideally, you won't have to arbitrate a CPG violation on your own. Convene a small committee, with diverse representation, and ensure that they understand what is required of them. You could also

offer to support their participation in a [code of conduct training program](#).

Again, the house party metaphor can be helpful to think through power imbalances and any negative repercussions for members who are given this additional authority.

Responding to transgressions – punitive vs. restorative approaches

Depending on the gravity of the situation, you'll have to consider what constitutes the appropriate response to the incident. If someone has broken the law, consult with a lawyer and report the offense to the appropriate authorities. But for small incidents, it's up to you and your committee. Options include temporary or permanent bans from community spaces and events, mediating conversations between the people involved until they resolve the issue, or suggesting that someone take on some training or education before their membership is reinstated.

Restorative approaches to conflict resolution are not without their challenges, and often work best when facilitated by a trained individual. Consider if you or someone on your team has the bandwidth to take some additional professional development in this area.

Additional reading / Resources

- [CSCCE's Community Participation Guidelines now available](#) – In this blog post, the member of a CSCCE Working Group describe how they co-created a set of Core Values Statements and ultimately CSCCE's Community Participation Guidelines.
- Center for Scientific Collaboration and Community Engagement (2020). Creating core values statements. Woodley and Pratt doi: [10.5281/zenodo.3906620](#)
- [How to respond to Code of Conduct reports](#) – This guide created by CoC experts Valerie Aurora and Mary Gardiner offers a deep look at how to respond to CoC violations.
- [We will not cancel us](#) – In this short booklet, adrienne maree brown explores cancel culture and restorative justice.

Reflection questions

1. **How do you make your guidelines - and reporting process - visible? If someone comes as a +1 of a friend and ends up in a subgroup, would they even know who to report a problem to (do you share this info on entry to everyone? Have a designated CoC steward in each room? Something else?)**

   E.g., We make sure that our community participation guidelines are posted in every room, and when there is any new program, or an existing program where new members are present, we re-share our core values.

2. **The metaphor can help us think through how our code of conduct might intersect (or not) with those of others. What happens if we evict someone from our party and they start shouting on the street? Whose concern is that? Should we tell other neighbors in case that person is invited to their events in the future where there may be overlapping attendees?**

   E.g., Our reporting guidelines are currently set up to protect our members' privacy as a priority. However, the metaphor is making me realize that this might not always be possible...after all, someone causing a scene in the street is likely to be identified by onlookers from other houses. And then if we are seen to do nothing, and don't talk to our neighbors about the disturbance, this reflects poorly on the community and its leadership.