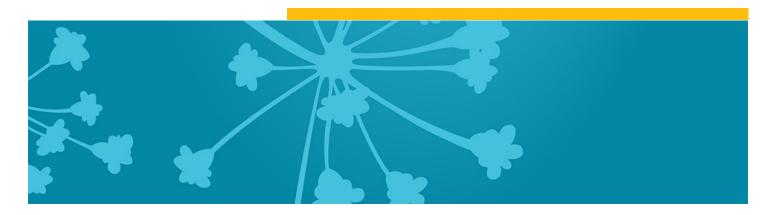# CSCCE

Creating an engaging community on Slack

This guidebook will help you set up, grow, and support your community on Slack

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What is Slack?

More and more groups are deciding to set up an online space for their ongoing communications in Slack - a free tool which can be used in a web browser, and also downloaded as a smartphone or desktop app. Slack is, at its core, an instant messenger tool (you contribute by text-based comments) with the ability to create subgroups or channels for specific projects or interest areas as well as hosting one on one conversations and video calls. You can also integrate your Slack workspace with work tools you use already, such as Google Drive, Zoom, and Outlook.

This guidebook will help you with

- Setting up a new Slack workspace for your community or working group
- Ensuring your Slack group is inclusive and engaging
- Supporting members in the group through ongoing activities and engagement

*Note: This is **not** a technical how-to guide about using Slack, nor do we cover advanced technical integrations or how to use Slack as a workflow management tool e.g., in an editorial context or on a coding project.*

This guidebook is for

- Anyone, but most likely community engagement managers setting up a Slack workspace for a community of practice or working group
- Existing Slack groups that are looking to build an engaged community of active members who communicate regularly around a particular set of topics or projects

Before you start

Before you start to create your Slack group and invite members to it, we recommend that you consider the following prompts. You can also use the accompanying worksheet in the Appendix to this guidebook to explore the prompts in more detail.

Purpose: What's the purpose of your group? What is it for and can you describe what success would look like? For example, the goal of the CSCCE Slack group is "To connect scientific community managers and others interested in building communities in STEM so that they might support one another, share resources, and advance the field of scientific community engagement."

Metrics for success: How will you know that you have achieved your goal? This could include assessing numbers of active users, comments, or resources posted on a weekly or monthly basis. As your community matures, the metrics that you track may also evolve e.g. to track the number of new working groups formed, or number of conversations started without staff prompts.

Target audience: Who are you trying to connect and does Slack fit into their daily workflow? Are there other platforms that your community members currently use that could be adapted for your purpose?

Membership policy: As a community manager, you will need to curate your group membership somehow. Is your group open or invitation only? How do you decide who is invited or excluded? The answer greatly depends on your goals and motivations, with invite-only groups more likely to provoke feelings of safety. If you're starting a new community, carefully consider the first 50 members that you'll invite, as they will likely influence the experience of subsequent members of the group. You may also encourage new members to join by clearly describing the benefits of doing so, while at the same time sharing expectations for participation.

Content: What belongs on Slack? Is Slack meant to replace certain emails or act as a complement to email? For example, Slack channels can be a good way to make progress on a project visible to others as an alternative to creating a noisy email thread where lots of people are cc'd. It works less well as a way to manage individual to-do items e.g. if a community member has a specific but non-urgent request of you, or as a place to store and manage documents.

Setting up your group

What follows is a non-exhaustive (but substantive) list of items you could consider incorporating in your management of a new or existing Slack group. Check out the accompanying Appendix to this guidebook for example templates for some of these items.

- **Create a welcome email for new members.** How will you invite new members to your group aside from issuing an invite from Slack? A welcome email with a few clear calls to action gives new members some places to start. You might encourage them to say hello in the #welcome channel and point out how they can search for optional channels to join. You might also point out that Slack has desktop and smartphone apps that they can run on their device(s).

- **Consider setting up a very short new member survey.** Just 5 questions can help you as a community manager learn more about each new member, and what they might need to feel comfortable participating in the group. This can be used to inform your programming. You might also consider periodically reporting out to your community about general learnings from the survey results. See the Appendix for an example survey.

- **Develop a quick start guide to help new users get acquainted with your Slack group** (Download the CSCCE quick start guide to Slack here). This should include the basic technical steps for getting started, highlighting those that are particularly important for your community. For example, if your community members do not already know one another, you may ask people to add a photo and bio to their profile. How you write your guide sets the tone of your group, so get yourself into a beginner's mindset and do not assume that everyone is already familiar with the technology.

- **Share accessibility information early and often.** For example, Slack has large text options for smartphone users, the ability to set your zoom level in the desktop app, and an option to stop animations from playing automatically. You can also control whether notifications are accompanied by a sound.

- **Co-create a code of conduct.** This is a critical piece of documentation that delineates acceptable and unacceptable behaviors in the group. You can refer back to this document regularly and remind users to do the same. You could use the Slackbot to regularly (e.g., once a month) post the code of conduct. Co-creation of the code of conduct with a group of your community members ensures community buy-in.

- **Clearly set expectations.** For example, it is helpful to remind new users that, while Slack supports synchronous conversations, they should not necessarily expect immediate responses from others who may not be logged in or are busy. This is particularly relevant for communities spread across several time zones, and also provides flexibility to members with less conventional work schedules. You might also point out that members can snooze notifications at any time.

- **Welcome new members personally.** This might take the form of a video call where you or a member of your welcome team (see "Other tips" below) offer to answer any questions the new member might have about the platform and take feedback about what is useful and what else

they might like to see. If your community is too large, consider drafting a welcome email and then offer to take any questions via Slack DM or set up a monthly "new members" group call.

- **Decide on a core set of channels for all members.** For example: #welcome (for introductions), #community or #main (for conversations of general relevance), and #water_cooler (for miscellaneous questions, comments, and even jokes). Add new members to this small subset of channels (opt-out) and then let them choose their own adventure (opt-in) and join or create other channels.

- **Consider which channels to start with - and which to make default vs optional.** A #welcome channel can be a great way to encourage members to break the ice and say hello - and will also help existing members to get to know new ones. #job-opportunities is another common channel in communities of practice. Consider creating separate, optional channels for any high-volume activities that may not be of interest to everyone e.g. a #work_out_loud channel (where members come to share what they are doing that day or week).

- **Curate your channels with care. Do not create too many channels all at once!** This will overwhelm new members and deter engagement. It may also imply that members of the community are not welcome to create or suggest their own channels (again, this is something you should decide when you set up your community). Encourage members to use threads to keep conversations contained, and model the use of reaction emojis.

- **Consider the power dynamics of channel membership.** If the boss is part of the #happyhour channel, will it really serve its purpose? Or can you ask them to help to set the tone in a welcoming way? Slack also offers public and private channels which can help to navigate power dynamics and volume considerations.

- **Get things going!** Start some conversations, ask questions, and actively engage people by @mentioning them.

Day to day running

- **Develop regular programming.** For example, Monday might be "work out loud" day, Wednesday might be for virtual high fives or work wins, and on Friday afternoons you might have an online social hour.

- **Be attentive to your community** and offer assistance or guidance where appropriate e.g. periodic technical tips can prompt members to update their bio, add a photo, or check out additional channels. Pay attention to member questions left unanswered and be ready to jump in and facilitate further discussion (or invite others to join the conversation if you know their area of expertise is relevant).

- **Use the rules of improv to have fun and build together**. If you see an unanswered question can you build on it by sharing a resource or @-ing other members that you know have expertise in this area?

- **Highlight additional programming off-Slack**. If you host a monthly community call or are setting up working groups, don't forget to post reminders about these in the #community channel that all members belong to. You may decide to create a channel specifically for admins to post notes, recordings, or action items from meetings or calls.

- **Model the behavior you would like to see**. In the beginning, you should model the member behaviors you would like to see on Slack. For example, if you have a work out loud channel, make sure to post there yourself. Once the community is active, you can reduce this modeling behavior and focus more on addressing any emerging new needs of the community.

- **Share resources**. Consider a channel devoted to resource sharing for members to contribute to. Actively invite people to contribute in areas in which you know they have experience.

Other tips

- **Check your metrics - and adapt accordingly!** While Slack's free instance only offers limited metrics, you'll be able to roughly determine activity levels and participation in your group. Are there people that you haven't heard from that you could reach out to directly with an ask - or @ them on a thread about something they are interested in?

- **Consider sending out a regular, Slack-focused newsletter via email.** (See the accompanying Appendix to this guidebook for an example.) This may help to engage less active users by synthesizing content in a summary format and providing entry points for joining a conversation. It will also help you as a community manager stay abreast of what is going on in your community. Be careful to give credit for contributions and highlight new and active members while not revealing sensitive conversations or "outing" people who have shown vulnerability in some way that they may not want to be amplified.

- **Establish a welcome team of willing volunteers.** Typically, these will be super-users who are comfortable with Slack, but they may also be members who wish to get more involved in the group. These volunteers might encourage new members by commenting on their introductory posts and starting conversations that align with their expertise. Create a private channel for your welcome team to coordinate with one another.

- **Be actively patient.** Don't expect your community to magically come together, but don't bombard them with daily asks or a constant stream of new channels. A weekly content calendar will help with this, allowing you to create programming in a strategic, varied, and inclusive way.

Resources

Many of the following resources are available in the accompanying [Appendix to this guidebook](#).

1. Slack intentions worksheet (see Appendix)
2. Pre-launch checklist (see Appendix)
3. [Slack invite bot](#) – to create a bot and admin interface to handle user join requests and related email notifications for an invite-only Slack community
4. Example invitation email (see Appendix)
5. New member survey (see Appendix)
6. Slack quick start guide (available to download [here](#))
7. Weekly newsletter example (see Appendix)