PeerJ

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Director of Communities
PeerJ

▶ SCHOLARLY COMMUNICATION
▶ OPEN SCIENCE
▶ PUBLISHER

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

Hi! I am the Director of Communities at PeerJ, an Open Access publisher. I work with a whole host of different communities to develop programs and products that facilitate their contributions to scientific communication. That can include making it more efficient and accessible to publish a research article; publishing the collected outputs of a conference; or working with large groups, such as research associations, to launch a community publishing hub. The communities that I work with include editorial boards, partner organizations and institutions, small research teams, and individual contributors. Their members represent a broad range of research interests, career stages, geographical locations, affiliations, and more.

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

I earned a bachelor's degree in sociology at Bristol University. After a short period working in a building society, I started as a Content Development Editor at ProQuest, then moved to PLOS, where I was Publishing Development Manager. I moved to PeerJ in 2020. This is my first role with the term "community" in the title, but collaborating with communities to find publishing solutions has been a consistent theme throughout my career.

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

My key responsibilities are:

- **Engaging –** listening to, and communicating with, our contributors.
- **Advocating –** applying what we learn from our engagement to the products and programs we develop, and advocating for the different needs and aims of the communities we work with.
- **Developing –** adapting our programs, our relationships, and ourselves to better serve those communities.

On a practical level, this means talking to community members and stakeholders and working out what they need to achieve their aims. We then feed that knowledge into product and program development, and then communicate the outcomes to other communities that may benefit from these outcomes.

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

We've just launched an exciting new program. We wanted to address the unrewarded labor that researchers and academics provide to publishers, and make open access publishing (where the burden of payment can fall on the researcher rather than their institution) accessible to more people. We developed and launched PeerJ Tokens. Now, every time someone contributes to peer review, they earn Tokens, which can be converted into discounts on their publishing charges. What makes Tokens unique is that they can be accumulated over time, pooled with co-authors, and transferred to other users - so they are flexible, as well as being fair. We hope they will act as an incentive for communities to publish with us and help remove cost as a barrier to open access scientific communication.
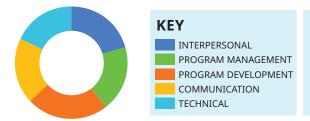
## DO YOU SHARE COMMUNITY MANAGEMENT DUTIES WITH ANYONE ELSE? WHERE DOES YOUR POSITION FIT WITHIN YOUR ORGANIZATION?

I'm lucky to work with a great team. I report to PeerJ's CEO, who has been very supportive of developing a Communities Team and understands the value of engaging and communicating with our contributors. The Communities Team includes two Editorial Community Managers, who work very closely with our editorial boards and authors; a Social Media Community Manager, who works on a lot of the public interaction with our communities via our blog and social channels; and, very importantly, our Lead UX Designer, who is great at uncovering and understanding our users' motivations and developing design ideas and functionality that meets their needs.

**KEY**

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

**ⓘ NATHANIEL'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 Nathaniel used over the last 12 months.

► For more information, see the CSCCE skills wheel.

## WHAT DO YOU LIKE MOST ABOUT BEING A COMMUNITY MANAGER?

Every day is different, because every community is different. We're constantly hearing new ideas and uncovering new needs, so working out ways to address them and integrate them is really engaging and exciting. I get to work with fantastic scientists doing really exciting research, and help them communicate that research so it reaches as wide an audience as possible. In a single day I can go from product development to press releases, from dinosaurs to artificial intelligence. And I work with a great team, so there's not much not to like!

## 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?

When I first moved into scientific publishing (from a humanities and social sciences role), not having a scientific background was sometimes difficult - both in terms of my understanding and the reception I got. But I've found that I can counter this by showing enthusiasm and interest in people's research and by working to better understand their interests. Because the communities we work with cover so many subjects, it's impossible to be an expert in everything; but it's easy to be enthusiastic and engaged.

I've been lucky enough to receive training in community and project management, as well as product and program development, but the best education and professional development has been the people I've learned from along the way - both colleagues and community members. Their support, patience and willingness has been invaluable.

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

There are myriad barriers in any community to people participating and contributing, and often these barriers hold back the community from achieving its goals. These barriers are sometimes invisible to others, and sometimes they have been placed there in good faith but with unforeseen - and detrimental - outcomes. Sometimes they are a historic legacy, and sometimes they are the unintentional result of innovation. So much that we do is about finding barriers, understanding why they exist, and figuring out how to remove them.

Because we work with global communities, these barriers are often caused by geography, language, or visibility. For example, consider a person's opportunity to participate in peer review. We can open up this opportunity by creating tools that allow anyone to volunteer. We can make it easier to participate by providing clearly structured, well documented forms to make peer review more straightforward. We can support that participation by providing points of contact for those who need guidance, and we can provide feedback to help contributors develop their skills while we develop our support and guidance.

I have seen that process happen and it has improved the ability to participate within communities that I have worked with. Often it takes someone with an outside perspective to help a community identify and remove those barriers to participation and facilitate equitable engagement. This is why scientific community engagement managers can be so valuable.

**Last updated April 2022**