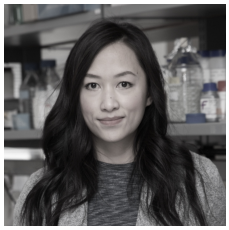

CSCCE Community Manager Case Study
doi: 10.5281/zenodo.6415647

Pajau Vangay
Scientific Community Engagement Manager
National Microbiome Data Collaborative

- INTERDISCIPLINARY
- INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT
- INFRASTRUCTURE ORGANIZATION

> "The ability to foster co-creation is what sets community managers apart from other science-adjacent roles."

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

I'm the Scientific Community Engagement Manager for the National Microbiome Data Collaborative (NMDC): a program funded by the Department of Energy with the long-term goal of making microbiome multi-omics data more findable, accessible, interoperable, and reusable (FAIR). We're enabling discovery of microbiome datasets via our NMDC Data Portal, providing standardized bioinformatic workflows in a user-friendly GUI (NMDC EDGE), and encouraging broader use of community standards with our NMDC Submission Portal. Our resources are developed for, and in partnership with, the microbiome research community. The NMDC community includes researchers, societies, funders, and publishers who are part of the microbiome data ecosystem. Our members interact with us and with each other via our Slack workspace, monthly webinar series, Twitter, and via our two champions programs.

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

I have training in computer science, food microbiology, and computational biology. During my PhD program, I studied the impacts of diet, migration, and other environmental factors on the human gut microbiome and the consequences for health. While I didn't realize it at the time, my first introduction to community management happened during my PhD when my colleagues and I used a community-based participatory research approach to form equitable partnerships with members of the communities in which we conducted research. We were refining our research methods, learning from the community, and adapting our processes: we were co-creating! After finishing my PhD, I completed a California Council on Science & Technology science policy fellowship and then joined the NMDC.

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

Some of my responsibilities include:

- Managing our two champions programs (supporting external scientists to advance our mission).
- Managing and leading our user research activities to help define features/requirements for our platforms.
- Managing and contributing content to our communications materials (website, social media, newsletters).
- Managing and leading outreach activities (webinars, workshops, conference sessions, presentations, ad-hoc events, etc.).

I don't do any of the above completely on my own – I have an awesome engagement team working with me.

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

Building and maintaining a community of NMDC Ambassadors has been one of my favorite projects. The NMDC team supports and trains these early career researchers to host NMDC events within their own communities. Through their events, NMDC Ambassadors enable us to understand how the broader microbiome community is using metadata standards, and their efforts have allowed us to be more targeted with our internal project priorities. It's been inspiring to not only support, but also co-create, with such talented and motivated early career researchers; this is what excites me the most about community management. This was also the first time I was able to build a program from scratch as a community manager, and through the process I learned how to plan, implement, and manage a program, and also how to be kinder and more flexible with myself (which is very important as a community manager).

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KEY

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

PAJAU'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 Pajau 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?

The NMDC is led by a lead Principal Investigator and four co-PIs, with 40+ team members across four national laboratories who contribute to our core priorities: linking metadata standards, containerizing bioinformatic workflows, developing data infrastructure, and engagement activities. Seven team members contribute to engagement activities, and several also contribute to the technical activities on the project. While it may appear as though we have a large team, it's important to note that most team members do not spend 100% of their time on work for the NMDC. (I'm one of the few whose time is fully dedicated to this project.) While my position originally fell into the "engagement" sub-team, I also contribute to infrastructure and metadata discussions. NMDC team members are no longer defined by sub-teams because we found that siloing our team members was creating artificial barriers.

WHAT DO YOU LIKE MOST ABOUT BEING A COMMUNITY MANAGER?

Having recently completed a PhD focused on microbiome data, I've struggled with many of the issues that the NMDC is trying to address. My dual experiences in science and community engagement have enabled me to get a deep understanding of our community's perspectives and opened up opportunities for co-creation. Over the past year, it's been energizing to learn from and co-create with our Ambassadors; this ability to foster co-creation is what sets community managers apart from other science-adjacent roles.

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?

Being a scientific community manager for the first time is challenging, and it can often be difficult to navigate how to set expectations for ourselves and our programs, especially during the early stages of a project. Part of this has to do with the fact that scientific community management is not a household term at most organizations yet, and there isn't a "one size fits all" way to do it. CSCCE's Community Engagement Fundamentals course and community of practice provided a really important foundation and support system for me; I found solace in sharing stories with other community managers who were in similar phases of their projects. I wish I'd had these resources earlier on in my role.

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

Regular bi-directional engagement with our community has been critical in understanding how to improve and refine our core activities. For example, many of the features on the NMDC Data Portal were informed by usability interviews conducted with our community, and we are continuing to listen to our community as we take their feedback to improve our platforms and resources. We're also starting to see the impacts of our Ambassadors program events: on an individual level, researchers are learning about metadata standards for the first time, and on an institutional level, decision-makers are incorporating standards into their systems and exploring how to collaborate with the NMDC.

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