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- CROSS-DISCIPLINARY
- OPEN SCIENCE
- FUNDING ORGANIZATION

“ As science shifts toward a more open and collaborative culture, I’m convinced that we’ll need community managers to facilitate collaboration and exchange between disciplines. ”

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

Hello, my name is Maria Cruz and I am a Senior Open Science and Data Policy Advisor at the [Dutch Research Council \(NWO\)](https://www.nwo.nl/) – the main research funder in the Netherlands. We launched a funding program at the end of 2019 aimed at supporting researchers who are developing, testing, and implementing innovative ways of making research open, accessible, transparent and reusable. Now we want to connect the teams that were awarded funding last year so that they can exchange knowledge and experience and potentially collaborate on topics of common interest.

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

I was trained as a scientist. Soon after receiving my PhD in Astrophysics, I coordinated the development of a [strategic plan and infrastructure roadmap for astronomy in Europe](#). This involved coordinating the work and activities of a large and diverse group of people from across Europe. While I was not formally managing a community in this role, I had to gain and deploy many of the [skills and competencies](#) that are used by CSCCE to describe the role of a community manager. I didn't have any formal training in this area, so I had to learn on the job. After this position, I spent many years working in scholarly publishing, science communication, and education before I joined the open science world. Now, at NWO (and in my previous position as a Community Manager at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam) I often find myself drawing on the engagement skills I learned years ago in my first professional role.

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

I am not a full-time community manager, nor was I hired primarily as a community manager. Still, my role includes some community management responsibilities. They are centered around:

- **Event and content planning:** I organize a webinar series that showcases the open-science projects we fund.
- **Strategic development and program design:** After taking CSCCE's [Scientific Community Engagement Fundamentals](#), I wrote a vision and mission for the community and a community engagement plan.
- **Networking:** I develop and maintain relationships across the community and the stakeholder landscape. In particular, we are planning to work together with the existing network of [Open Science Communities](#) at the Dutch universities to help us with some of our community engagement goals.

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

Last year my colleagues and I developed and ran the [Open Science Fund](#), a call for projects specifically designed to stimulate open-science practices. The projects demonstrated stupendous enthusiasm for open science, and reading them was one of the highlights of my year. Open science builds trust and collaboration within and across disciplinary fields and it was wonderful to see that reflected in the project proposals. The grant application form included an open science track record question, since the program also aims at [recognizing and rewarding researchers' participation in open science](#). The responses to the open science track record question were truly inspiring; some of the answers are [available through our website](#). Many researchers are not only making their own research outputs open, accessible, transparent and re-usable; they're also sharing best practices and inspiring others through active participation in local open science communities or even going as far as founding and building those communities.



KEY

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



MARIA'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 Maria 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 do not currently share community management duties with anyone else. I am part of a small team working on open science policies at NWO's Executive Board Office and I work closely with the team running the Open Science Fund. I also collaborate with colleagues from our Communications department to create and disseminate content related to the Open Science Fund projects and the teams behind these projects.

WHAT DO YOU LIKE MOST ABOUT BEING A COMMUNITY MANAGER?

I love the matchmaking aspect of community management. It's such a joy and a privilege to connect people who share ideas, passions, and interests. It can be a very powerful way to create value in a community. Recently, at a webinar we organized, we brought together speakers who worked on related open-science projects but had never met. I found it rewarding to see how much they enjoyed learning about each other's work and connecting by sharing their knowledge and experience.

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?

I think community managers in general would benefit if more members of the scientific community recognized and appreciated their roles. It is a complex and demanding role that requires a wide range of skills and competencies that their colleagues often underestimate. Moreover, the activities of community manager positions - and the impacts - aren't always well understood by those in positions of leadership, or they're taken for granted by those who benefit from them. There can also be this notion that "if you build it, they will come," by which I mean that many people think that it only takes a meeting or two to create a community, and then it will run on its own. This misconception can make it difficult for community managers to get the resources they need to develop and maintain a well-functioning community.

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

The [projects that received support](#) from the Open Science Fund are testament to the importance of community management in science and research. [Many of them](#) involve the development of open-source tools and software or devising and setting standards for data sharing, and community management is essential for these activities. As science shifts toward a more open and collaborative culture, I'm convinced that we'll need community managers to facilitate collaboration and exchange between disciplines, and to connect researchers with the infrastructure, support services, and expertise networks that can advance their work.

Last updated April 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: Maria Cruz. Cruz, Pratt, Sidik, and Woodley doi: [10.5281/zenodo.6422583](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.6422583)