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- GEOSCIENCES
- CAPACITY BUILDING
- INFRASTRUCTURE ORGANIZATION

“Community managers create structure and opportunities that help others, including scientists, to realize the full potential of the work they are doing.”

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

I'm the Community Director for the [Earth Science Information Partners \(ESIP\)](#). ESIP is an organization funded by NASA, NOAA, and the USGS to help members of the Earth science data community find each other across organizations and work together. ESIP fosters rich collaborative experiences for our volunteer participants, including conferences and virtual meetings, and provides seed funding.

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

After graduating with an MS in geosciences, I worked as a geochemical data manager at Columbia University. This role was highly varied and included skills that I now recognize as essential elements of scientific community management. I liked the detailed work of data curation and application testing. I also liked engaging with scientists from around the world, finding and fostering connections between them, and helping them make their data more FAIR (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, Reusable). I knew I wanted to spend more of my time making connections and lowering barriers to collaboration. So, I applied for the role with ESIP.

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

Most of my work involves:

- **Supporting the efforts** of the [30+ collaborative groups](#) within ESIP
- **Managing the ESIP Community Fellows Program**, which supports ~10 graduate students and postdocs each year who are interested in bridging the gap between informatics and Earth science
- **Contributing to the design and execution** of ESIP's two biannual conferences, including stewarding community contributions
- **Connecting researchers with informatics experts** who can help them make their data FAIR

One of the most important ways that I achieve these goals is by **listening** to members of our collaborative groups and to those in the broader Earth science community. What I hear helps me to know who I need to **connect**. Listening also helps me discern what information needs to be **communicated** and **elevated** from within our sub-communities to the broader community and beyond, such as outputs of our collaborative groups on topics like data stewardship, citation, quality, and much more. Listening also helps me and the rest of the ESIP staff **design** new ways to encourage Earth science data professionals to work together across boundaries on common challenges or opportunities.

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

Data Help Desks are some of my favorite events. That's when we recruit informatics experts and connect them with researchers who are seeking techniques for managing their data in a more open and FAIR manner, leveraging partnerships with scientific societies like AGU and EGU and volunteers from dozens of other organizations. A major challenge has been transitioning to a virtual format (largely on Twitter) and, more recently, a hybrid format. This challenge gave rise to benefits: we have been able to broaden our reach to start more conversations and feature more tools than ever. I have recently been compiling a guidebook aimed at empowering others to plan and host similar events.



KEY

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



MEGAN'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 Megan 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 am part of a team of five, where other members are the Executive Director, Operations Director, Communications Manager, and the ESIP Lab Director. There is an element of community management to most of these positions. Within our [system of holacracy](#), which I love and am always happy to talk about, we are empowered to make decisions for the roles we hold. Still, getting input from the team - particularly a team that values community management - is very valuable and I think the whole community benefits when staff members collaborate.

WHAT DO YOU LIKE MOST ABOUT BEING A COMMUNITY MANAGER?

Community management is focused on people first, and I really like relationship building and connecting people. Even with life becoming increasingly automated, there's just no substitute for a conversation! I also really appreciate the variety in my work - in who I am working with and their areas of interest, as well as the variety of tasks I am responsible for. Finally, I love being in proximity to nascent collaborations and ideas and watching them grow.

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 we do our jobs well, we elevate others and are, therefore, sometimes invisible. While I'm not in this line of work to make a name for myself, there are times when I feel relegated to a generic box of "support staff." I think we still have a long way to go before we've elevated community management to a profession that most people take seriously. Right now, many people see us as just staff members with some people skills, and they are not aware that there is theory, practice, and evidence behind the way that we work. CSCCE is doing a lot in this respect, and the organization has done a lot for me personally.

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

Science is not just about collecting data, but also figuring out how those data relate to other data and how to make meaningful decisions with them. This work is not easy. It requires people - their expertise, enthusiasm, and good nature. Community managers create structure and opportunities - to find each other, to share and brainstorm with one another, to learn about what has worked and what hasn't. From broad-scale programming design to small logistical things done well, what we do helps others to realize the full potential of the work they are doing, so that it can have the greatest impact.

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