



Helen Zenner
Community Manager
the Node

- LIFE SCIENCES
- OUTREACH AND EXTERNAL COMMUNICATION
- PUBLISHER

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

My name is Helen Zenner and I’m the Community Manager of [the Node](#), a community site for developmental and stem cell biologists hosted by the journal [Development](#) and our publisher, [The Company of Biologists](#). I have been working here for almost a year now. We mostly interact with our community online, primarily through our website and also via social media – but I’m excited to get back to conferences where I can meet people in person! Our website is aimed at scientists, but developmental and stem cell biology is a broad field so we try to make sure our content is accessible to non-specialists.

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

Up until 11 months ago, I was a wet-lab scientist. I received my PhD in cell biology from University College of London, and most recently I worked as a postdoc in Daniel St Johnston’s lab in Cambridge where I studied how membrane trafficking shapes development. During this postdoc, I decided I wanted to step away from the bench, and the role of Community Manager of the Node really appealed to me. I love that I get to amplify the research of others, especially early career researchers, and share news and resources with the community.

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

I have some tasks that I complete every day, such as maintaining our website and keeping our social media up to date. Our main social media channel is Twitter, and I use it to tell our community about new features on our website and to amplify tweets from others. Then, on a more ad hoc basis, I invite people to contribute to the site (users don’t need permission to post but we often send out invitations), write articles, and maintain our events listings. I’m also on-hand to help users with posting and editing, as well as to answer more general inquires.

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

It has been quite a change going from working in the lab to taking on my new role, so I feel like a lot of my time has been taken up with learning the ropes! We have started a new series called ‘Featured resource’ that I really like. The aim is to highlight services, databases, and software tools that help support scientists with their research. These resources are essential, but we feel that they are often overlooked, so we aim to highlight both the resources and the people behind them. We have just had a strategy meeting to make new plans, so look out for more new features for next year!



KEY

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



HELEN'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 Helen 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?

Although I'm the only Community Manager, the Node is very much a team effort. All the front-section editors of Development are part of the Node team (and I'm Online Editor for Development). I also interact a lot with the Community Managers of FocalPlane and preLights, the other community sites run by The Company of Biologists, as well as our Science Communicator Officer and marketing team.

WHAT DO YOU LIKE MOST ABOUT BEING A COMMUNITY MANAGER?

Now that I've left the lab, I get to view the latest research with a broader lens. I love being able to stay up-to-date with the latest work in developmental and stem cell biology, and it's exciting to work with scientists to help amplify their work. I also like commissioning content that helps with the professional development of early career researchers, such as 'how to' articles on academic writing or advocacy and outreach.

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?

Scientists in our community are busier than ever, so it can be hard for people to find the time to contribute to our site. Writing for the Node can boost the profile of researchers and their work, and it provides a valuable opportunity for early career researchers to practice writing. But obviously writing an article is an additional time commitment on top of what is often already a full schedule! Our website is a rich resource for the community because of all the scientists who take time to contribute.

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

I think that the Node is useful for the community because it provides an informal platform where scientists can interact, either as active contributors or subscribers. When the Node was first launched, the idea was that the site would only have a manager for the first few years and then it would be self-sustaining. Fortunately for me, that proved not to be the case! I think this is probably true for many scientific communities. Although the community itself can do a lot, it needs a person or a team to help coordinate members' efforts!

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