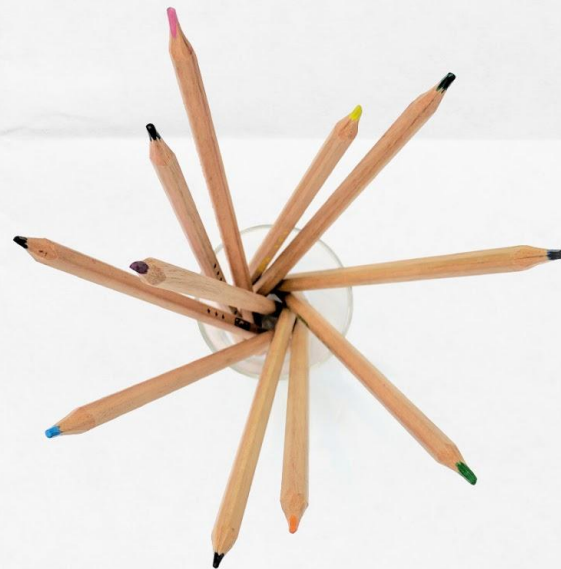The
Community
Canvas
Summary

A brief overview about the Community Canvas

May 2017 – Version 1.0

The Community Canvas is

...a framework that will help you build and run a new community, or analyze and improve an existing community.

It identifies the fundamental themes to cover and helps you ask the right questions.

"Community" means something different to every person. We have developed this tool in the hope of supporting anyone who runs an organization that brings people together and makes them feel like they belong, no matter if it's an alumni organization, a sports club or an HR department.

More about the Canvas, what "community" means to us and why we created it at
community-canvas.org
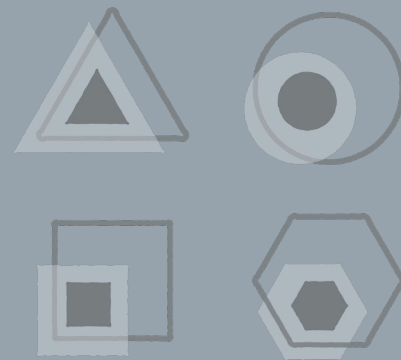
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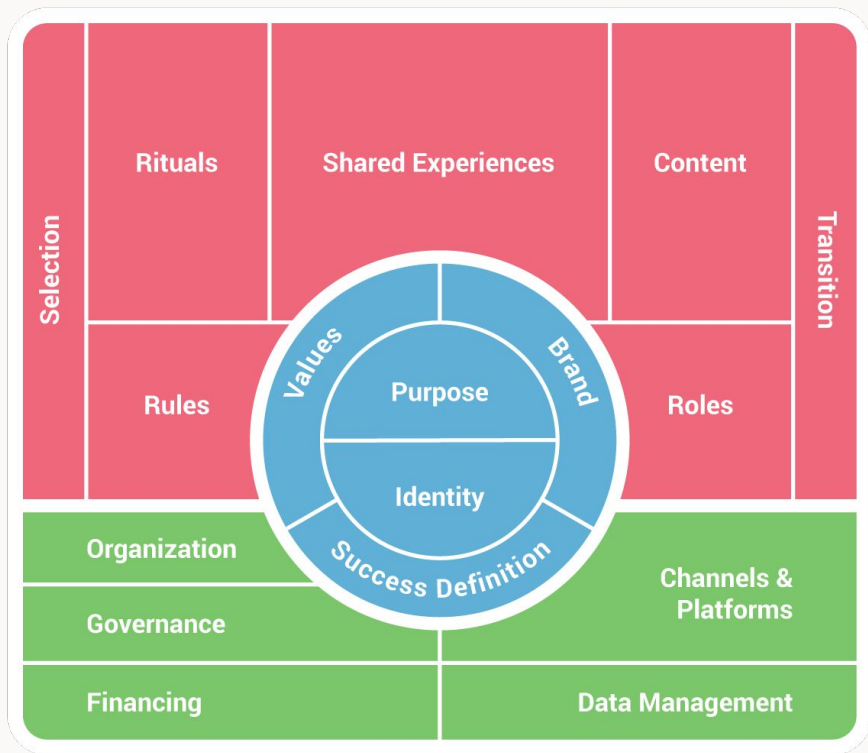
The Community Canvas has

3 Sections

Identity, Experience, Structure

which in turn are divided into

17 Themes

Identity   Who are we and what do we believe in?

The first part of the Canvas focuses on questions of belief. Strong communities have a clear and explicit sense of who they are, why they exist and what they stand for.

These aspects of the community are less tangible than the points covered in later parts of the Canvas. And as a result, they often get passed over. However, we believe that a confident sense of identity builds the very core of a successful community and informs all other elements around it. That's why in our Canvas, the Identity is the beating heart at the center of everything else, giving meaning and life to the rest of the organization.

The Identity section itself is layered like an onion. At its core are two elements: the community's purpose and the identity of its members. The questions why and who are quintessential and then inform the other elements of identity: the organization's values, its definition of success and its brand.

An authentic culture is one of the most valuable elements of any community, but also a very abstract concept to act upon. The elements covered under Identity are key ingredients towards a thriving community culture.

Themes

Purpose
Why does the community exist?

Member Identity
Who is the community for?

Values
What is important to us as a community?

Success Definition
How does the community define success?

Brand
How does the community express itself?

Experience

What happens in the community & how does it create value for the members?

In the second part of the Canvas we explore the community from the perspective of the members: what does actually happen in the community and how does it translate its purpose into activities that create tangible value for the members?

Every community experience starts with a member joining and at some point - consciously or not - a member leaving. Successful communities design these transition moments between the outside and the inside world as part of a larger journey.

A significant part of the Canvas is dedicated to two elements: Shared Experiences bring members together and fundamentally deepen the bonds among them. Rituals and traditions are individual and

recurring experiences that have a strong symbolic character.

The community's content strategy contributes to the overall experience. Communities who tell the stories of their members and share relevant content strengthen the bond among members and increase the overall value.

Every member is different and evolves over time. Smart communities provide different roles catering to different needs throughout the experience.

Lastly, we have found communities to work best when they have clear rules set in advance, so people know what their rights and expected responsibilities are.

Themes

Selection
How do people join the community?

Transition
How do members leave the community?

Shared Experiences
What experiences do members share?

Rituals
What rituals happen regularly?

Content
What content creates value for members?

Rules
What are the community's rules?

Roles
What roles can members play?

Structure What gives us stability in the long-term?

The third part of the Canvas focuses on the operational elements of running a community. While many communities evolve organically over time, only few survive in the long-term. Organizational aspects are often neglected, and the necessary structures aren't in place to deal with challenging situations, as they eventually and often suddenly come up.

This area goes beyond good management and processes, but presents a tremendous opportunity: most communities become more valuable the longer they exist, as trust both among the members and into the overall brand increases. But consistency is key. Visionary communities will put structures in place that will optimize for long-term stability.

Leadership deserves special attention in a community, as many are partially or fully volunteer run. What does that mean for incentive models, job descriptions and knowledge transfers?

Decision making is best clarified in advance and helps avoid and address conflicts, a surprisingly common sight within many communities.

Many communities fail because they do not figure out how to become financially sustainable. We highlight different models.

Most successful communities exist both in the offline and the online world and the choice of the right platforms matter. Lastly, the members' data is among the communities most valuable assets and it deserves thoughtful management.

Themes

Organization
Who runs the community?

Governance
How are decisions made in the community?

Financing
What is the community's plan to be financially sustainable?

Channels & Platforms
What channels does the community use to communicate and gather?

Data Management
How does the community manage the data of its members?

Get involved

The Canvas Guidebook

Explore the 17 themes in detail. Each theme with a list of key questions and further background to help you find answers for your own community.

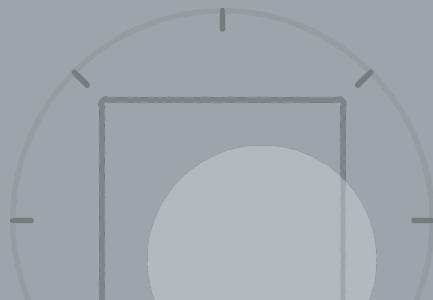**Download Guidebook**

Sign up for updates

Leave your email if you'd like us to message you when we have a new version available, when we publish case studies for the themes or other community building tools.

Sign Up

More about the Canvas

If you're curious to learn more about the Canvas, why we created it, who it is for and who we, the authors are, check out our website.

community-canvas.org