

CONNECTED COMMUNITY LEADER GUIDE

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Introduction

This guide is designed to support administrators and community leaders of Connected Community as they manage and cultivate Montana's online public health community. As stewards of the platform, community leaders play a crucial role in ensuring that Connected Community remains a valuable, reliable, and engaging space for public health professionals across the state. This document provides background on the platform, outlines its purpose within Montana's public health system, and establishes clear expectations, responsibilities, and best practices. Together, these guidelines help create a consistent and high-quality experience for all users who rely on Connected Community to collaborate, share knowledge, and strengthen the statewide public health network.

If you are interested in creating/hosting a community on the Connected Community Platform, **we ask that you review this guide prior to submitting your community proposal to the Connected Community team.**

The Connected Community platform represents an ongoing investment of funding, staff capacity, and partner resources to support collaboration across Montana's public health system. As community leaders, it is essential that you seek to actively steward your communities and encourage participation of its members, to ensure the platform remains a valuable and well-utilized resource.

1. Background: What is Connected Community?

Connected Community is an online engagement platform for Montana's public health professionals. Implemented in 2020 as part of the COVID-19 response, it was created to give Montana's public health workforce a dedicated space to connect with colleagues across the state, share knowledge and resources, and collaborate in a structured, interactive online environment. The platform supports discussions, resource sharing, events, networking, and targeted communication. The platform is managed, supported and monitored by representatives of partner organizations including DPHHS, Confluence Public Health Alliance, and Montana Public Health Institute.

Key features include:

- Online discussion forums
- Resource libraries and file management
- Member profiles and directory
- Reporting and analytics



Community leaders play a vital role in ensuring the platform remains organized, welcoming, and aligned with organizational goals.

2. Platform Intentions: Why We Use Connected Community

The primary purposes of implementing Connected Community include:

- **Building Community and Engagement**
Encourage meaningful interaction, collaboration, and knowledge exchange among community members.
 - **Centralizing Information**
Provide a single hub for resources, announcements, and conversations.
 - **Supporting Professional Development and Networking**
Offer spaces for peer-to-peer advice, networking, and subject-matter collaboration.
 - **Improving Communication**
Use targeted communication to reduce email overload and increase relevance.
 - **Enhancing Member Value**
Strengthen the connection members feel with the organization by giving them easy access to support, expertise, and each other.
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3. Criteria for Creating a New Community

To enhance the user experience, communities should be easily differentiated. Requests should be made via the New Community Request Form linked below. New communities should be created only when the following criteria are met:

- **Distinct Purpose**
The topic, program, or workgroup has a clearly defined purpose that is not adequately supported within any existing communities.
- **Identifiable Audience**
A specific, consistent group of users will benefit from the new space (e.g., a standing workgroup, program area, or specialized professional role).



- **Sustained Need**

The group is expected to collaborate or share information regularly over time, not just for a short-term project or one-time event.

- **Content Volume Justifies a Separate Space**

The expected amount of discussion, resource sharing, or updates would overwhelm or distract from broader communities if kept in an existing group.

- **Avoids Duplication or Fragmentation**

The proposed community does not duplicate the purpose of an existing one and would not divide or dilute participation in current spaces.

- **Clear Leadership and Maintenance Plan**

A community leader or designated group is committed to actively managing the community, including posting updates, responding to members, and maintaining content.

- **Long-Term Value**

The community supports Connected Community's broader goals of fostering communication, collaboration, and resource sharing across Montana's public health workforce.

Steps for requesting a new community:

1. Use this form to submit a new community request: [Connected Community: New Community Request Form](#). Please be prepared to share the following information as part of the request:
 - Name
 - Organization
 - Email
 - Proposed Community Name
 - Proposed Community Description
 - Community Audience -- Be specific
2. Once the form is submitted, the Connected Community super admins will review the request and contact you if additional information is needed, or if the request is approved or denied.

4. Community Leader Expectations



Community leaders should consistently represent the community and maintain a high standard of quality, professionalism, and responsiveness. Core expectations include:

- **Stewardship of the Community Environment**
Monitor discussions, provide guidance, and ensure the platform remains respectful and aligned with policy.
- **Content Management**
Curate and maintain up-to-date resources, announcements, and structural organization of community areas.
- **Proactive Engagement**
Facilitate conversation or answer unresolved posts to keep the community active and engaged.
- **Privacy and Policy Adherence**
Ensure all interactions follow organizational policies, privacy rules, and Connected Community [Terms and Conditions](#).

Community Leader Activity Requirements

To maintain a consistent and engaging experience for all members, community leaders are expected to meet the following minimum activity standards:

- **Post at least once per month** in their assigned community or topic area. Posts may include announcements, discussion prompts, resource highlights, or relevant updates.
- **Respond to unanswered member questions or comments within three business days.** Timely responses help maintain trust, keep conversations active, and support community engagement.
- **Monitor discussions regularly** to identify unanswered questions, off-topic posts, or content that may need moderation.
- **Encourage participation** by acknowledging member contributions, prompting further discussion, or connecting members to helpful resources.
- **Ensure accuracy and relevance** of any information shared or approved for publishing.
- **Attend annual meetings** to review best practices and discuss successes and challenges of communities: *stay tuned for more information on annual meetings.*



Important

The Connected Community team will review all communities on a yearly basis in Q4. Failure to adhere to the above guidelines may result in archiving or deleting the Community and resources.

5. Best Practices for Effective Administration

Community Management

- Encourage conversation by posting open-ended questions.
- Respond to unanswered posts within a reasonable timeframe (3 business days).
- Communicate in a way that is positive, respectful, and encourages participation from everyone.
- Redirect members to existing threads or resources to reduce duplication.

Content Organization

- Keep resource libraries tidy and consistently structured ([Manage Library Entries – Higher Logic](#); [Manage Folders & Move Entries – Higher Logic](#)).
- Archive outdated content to prevent confusion.

Moderation & Member Support

- Intervene politely but firmly in off-topic or inappropriate discussions.
- Provide step-by-step help when users ask questions about using the platform (community leaders can contact the Connected Community administrators if any questions arise that they need help with).

Analytics & Reporting

- Review engagement metrics regularly (e.g., number of community members, number of new discussion posts / responses within the past 30 days).
- Use insights to adjust content strategies or community structure.
- Share meaningful trends with internal stakeholders when appropriate.



Continuous Improvement

- Stay informed about Connected Community updates and new features.
- Participate in Connected Community support forums or trainings.
- Gather user feedback and incorporate improvements where feasible.

Optional - Community Modifications / Branding

- If interested, Community Leaders may add text, images / logos, and links to the community header to add details about the community or align with any branding
- To do this, click on “settings” next to the community name, then “additional HTML content”
- For help / additional information, see [Add HTML Content to Your Community Home Page – Higher Logic](#)

Community leads and users can always reach out to Super Admins with any questions or concerns via the “Contact Us” button in the top right area of the platform (next to the Terms and Conditions button).

Thank you for your leadership!

