



Creating Community Beyond the Team

Campus activities professionals often focus on the team building of their student organizations or professional groups, which is an important aspect of creating cohesive and effective organizations. However, a team shouldn't be so insulated that it becomes a clique and isn't welcoming to others. NACA's vision is "to create college communities where everyone belongs;" and that means boards and professional groups must work to create community beyond the team.

Rachel Happe, the founder of The Community Roundtable, stated:

"It is inherently human that we love to engage and form tight relationships with people to whom we can relate. We can congratulate ourselves if we've built a [team] where those tight relationships have formed and have created a network of like-minded individuals who promote each other and the [team]."

Happe goes on to explain that these tight relationships can put teams at risk for making community members feel out of place "even if the existing members are not trying to be overtly exclusive."

For example, a student programming board may do a great job with events and work really well together as a team. However, perhaps they have trouble recruiting new members or have received feedback about events not feeling as inclusive as they should. Building relationships among team members is such important work, but there is a delicate balance between a team coming together and working together seamlessly and that same team coming across as unwelcoming to possible new members and those who they serve in the community. How can we build a team while also encouraging community?

- Make time for team members to get to know each other
- Find a common goal/purpose - this may be the reason the team was formed; an annual goal; a goal that is part of a strategic plan; etc.
- Empower team members to make decisions
- Provide opportunities for seasoned members to connect with both new team and community members
- Create new member programs and give new members opportunities to connect with each other
- Focus on the people in the community that the team serves; bring these community members in to help the team
- Encourage and acknowledge new member participation
- Avoid inside jokes, specialized vocabulary, and other behaviors that may be perceived to be exclusionary by new members or community members outside of the team
- Remove any actual or perceived paths along the hierarchy, as new members or community members outside of the team may find this daunting or view as a barrier to participation
- Keep potential accessibility needs of the community in mind when creating and marketing meetings, programs, and events to ensure everyone feels truly welcomed

Remember that people join people. Ensuring that your team remains focused on the common purpose and the community it serves is crucial to maintaining that balance between creating effective and welcoming teams.

References

- Happe, R. (n.d.). Avoiding the community clique. The Community Roundtable. <https://communityroundtable.com/best-practices/avoiding-the-community-clique/>
- Miller, A. (2020, January 3). Creating effective professional learning communities. Edutopia. <https://www.edutopia.org/article/creating-effective-professional-learning-communities>