# Full Circle Online Community Purpose Checklist

It is helpful to think about what you want to accomplish and how, with an online group or community. Take a few minutes to fill out this checklist. Ignore any questions that are not relevant to your situation, or which you don’t know how to answer and add any particular context that is missing. *(Updated April 2013)*

## 1. Purpose/Outcome/Value Proposition

What is the desired purpose and outcome for the group? What is the INTENT behind the purpose? People are busy and if they don’t see and understand the purpose and its value, they won’t participate. So the value proposition has to make sense to members, sponsors and community leaders. (See slide 21 of[this slide deck](http://www.slideshare.net/choconancy/strategic-use-of-communities-of-practice))

* **What** is the purpose of your group for community sponsors, leaders and  potential members?  Does the purpose resonate across all three? Or does it vary?  How can you clearly communicate it? (Practice on a friend or colleague. If they don’t understand, refine your statement further.) I suggest you write this down. There is something about writing it that triggers different ideas than just "thinking about it!"
* **Who** is determining the purpose and goals? The sponsor or organizer? Group members? Community leaders? All three? How are these outcomes negotiated? Think about how ownership by members may or may not play a role in the success of the group.
* **What are the** group’s specific outcomes or process **goals**? Please describe them. (i.e. an outcome oriented group may be compiling a set of useful practices for use in the field or provide support around a product or process. A process oriented group may be about building relationships that can then be deployed in the field, such as a group of emergency relief workers, building relationships before disasters so they ca better respond and relate in the field. A network may look to create many weak connections and amplify the flow of ideas and information, but have very little interest in being in a community or group.)
* **What are the benefits** of participation? Are they measurable and visible to members and potential members? Describe them. Use the test question “what is in it for me” from the perspective of the participants, sponsors and leaders.
* **What is the strategic alignment?** Is the goal of the group in line with your organization? If the group is part of a larger organization, is the purpose consistent with organizational goals and culture? If not, how will that affect your group? Are you trying to do something new that may or may not be welcomed by the larger organization?
* **Must this happen online?** Is the group's purpose something that can only be done / accomplished online? Will it replace something offline? Or is it some combination?
* **What can you learn from others’ experiences?** Do you have examples of other groups with similar goals that you might explore for ideas? Please list, and if they have open websites, please bring the URLs to share. Carefully reconsider if you are duplicating existing online communities. People don't have time for more!

## 2. Target Membership

Who do you want to draw in or need to participate in your group? How would you describe them?

**Size**

* What is the minimum number of people you need for a successful initiative? Maximum?
* How might your community can expand and scale if there is greater interest? Where will these people come from? Will subgroups emerge or be needed?

**Demographics**

* What is the gender, professional, cultural make up of the group?
* Are there power issues (i.e. will some feel disinclined to participate because people of power are participating?)
* Are there any particular learning style issues you should be aware of?
* Are there any language issues such as the need for translation, a common language or set of (or no set of) common languages?
* How many different time zones might be represented by the group?
* Do you want your community to be public or private? If private, what determines eligibility?
* Where might you find potential participants? Are you building from an existing pool of participants? Or drawing in new people?
* Will there be subgroups that work on different things?

**Motivation and Interest**

* How motivated are people to participate? What is "in it for them?" Is this part of their job, or in addition to their job?
* How might you communicate with your participants to market your online interaction space? (Remember: just putting up an online space does not guarantee anyone will come participate in it!)

## 3. Type of Participant Interactions

To achieve your purpose, you generally design a set of activities. What kinds of member interactions do you want to foster? In other words, what activities must the group do to achieve its goals?

* Task focused?
* Discussion focused? Short term or ongoing discussions? Open topics or focused?
* Learning focused? What do they have to learn?
	+ Learning from each other via question & answer?
* Socially focused? Building relationships and/or community? Find people and create connections (social networking)
* Content focused? Creating, sharing, finding content such as documents or other  content?
* Are they started by you or by the members?
* Are the interactions intellectual? Social? Sensitive? Controversial?
* Will they generate content/knowledge that needs to be captured?
* Do the interactions need to be synchronous (same time) and/or asynchronous (different time) interactions? If synchronous, what range of time zones do you cover?

## 4. Technological Issues

* What kind of Internet access do most participants have?
	+ Dial up modem (yes, these still exist!)
	+ T-1 access
	+ DSL or Cable Modem access
	+ Unknown
* Is the Internet access available at all times; are there any limitations? (i.e do people have to pay for access, go to an internet café, etc.)
* Have you identified the minimum technical requirements for your online tools? (Remember, you will need to communicate this up front.) Do participants have adequate computer equipment to have a satisfactory experience on your system?
* What is the expected level of comfort and skill of the participants in using a web browser?
* Does the target audience use mobile devices? (phones, tablets, etc.)
* Are there any organizational firewall issues? (This can affect some synchronous applications such as Skype and some chat and web meeting tools.)
* Are there any prohibitions about downloading and installing applications?
* Do you have an online conferencing platform, need recommendations on a platform host or some other combination?
* What technical support can you offer your participants? Who will support YOU technically?

## 5. Time Frame

How long do expect the online interactions to last? Think back to your tasks. Generally 1 day F2F equals at least a week online, sometimes longer if your participants are online daily. For example, many of our colleagues in Africa don’t have daily access and may have to catch up during one day. Plan for longer time frames in this type of setting.

* Are there specific timelines or a project to be accomplished? Is there adequate time to accomplish the goals?
* Is it time-delimited event? If so, how long?
* Is it an ongoing online interaction space for conversation? If so, how will you keep up interest?

## 6. Guidelines, Rules and Governance

What kind of agreements, rules or governance do you want/need for your online interaction space?

* Will there be strong and defined rules, or more general and/or casual guidelines? Remember, balance control and emergence. People like enough structure to be comfortable, but not so much control as to feel oppressed or controlled.
* How will you communicate this to your members?
* Will there be problem resolution processes? How will you share that process?
* If this is a work team, what processes and agreements will you need? Virtual teams benefit from explicit processes and it is worth investing time in them. Short term events won’t usually sustain a lot of attention for process issues.
* Do members have to agree to a "Terms of Service" or other form of agreement before becoming members?

Who makes decisions in the community about the online interaction space?

* The online interaction leader(s), or sponsoring organization(s)?
* The members?
* Both?
* How?

Who will host or facilitate in your online interaction space?

* If not you, how will the hosts/facilitators be trained?
* What will be their responsibilities?
* How will they be supported and/or compensated?
* What kind of reporting will you have them do to monitor as needed?

## 7. Monitoring and Evaluation

How will you know if your group is meeting its goals?

* What evaluation methodologies or approaches would you like to consider and how might they work online?
* What qualitative measures? (Member satisfaction, feeling of belonging, sense of usefulness in their work, etc.)
* What quantitative measures (page views, # members, # posts, time elapsed for questions to be answered, tasks accomplished, etc.)

## Addendum: Online Meeting Logistics

For Time Delimited Events (like online e-conferences or meetings) here are a few more questions.

* Potential start/end dates? Expected event duration?
* Expected number of primary participants and their role(s)?
* Planned number of facilitators?
* Will you need facilitation coverage across time zones? Describe.
* Anticipated amount of time participants are expected to devote to the event and on what basis? (i.e. 1 hour a day Monday - Friday for two weeks plus 1 hour of pre-reading)
* Expected observers and their role?
* Staff participants?
* Guest speakers or presenters?

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