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# **BUILDING STRONG COMMUNITIES**

TOOLS MANUAL

25. 5. – 1. 6. 2025, Slovenia

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## INTRODUCTION

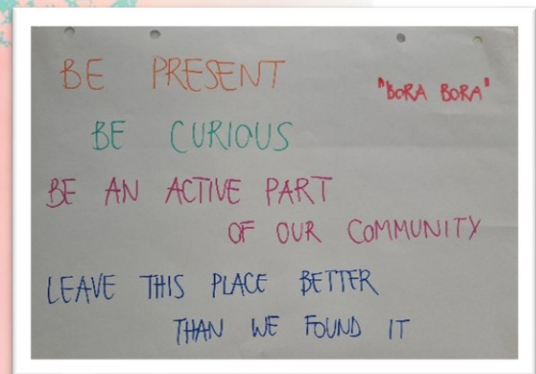
This manual came to be during one of the Erasmus+ training courses for youth workers, organized by Cirkus La Bulle/Društvo CIK. The course was about the importance of building strong communities. In the manual, you can find an introduction to community building and different activities we were doing during the week. The manual was written with the help of the trainers, who provided the material, and all the participants who were taking notes during the week. We hope it gives you some inspiration.

## GUIDELINES

When we came to Brežice, we started building our own little community.

Our guidelines were:

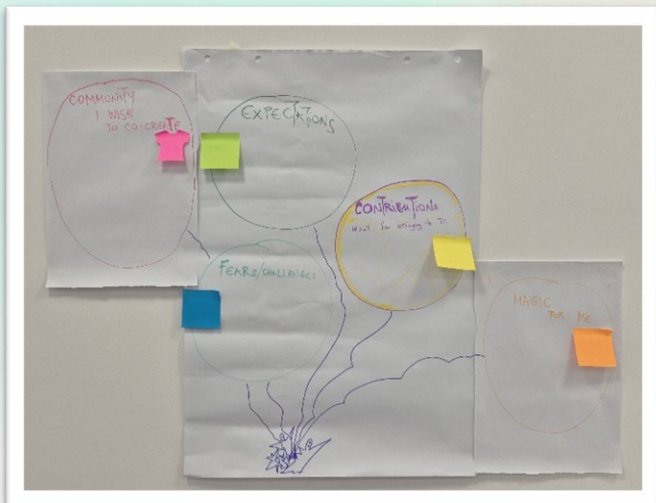
- to be present
- to be curious
- to be an active part of our community
- to leave this place better than we found it



## SETTING OURSELVES UP FOR SUCCESS

On the first day we all answered these questions:

- what do I expect from this training?
- what am I bringing to this training / community?
- what kind of community do I wish to co-create this week?
- what could be a challenge for me?
- what would make this training magic for me?



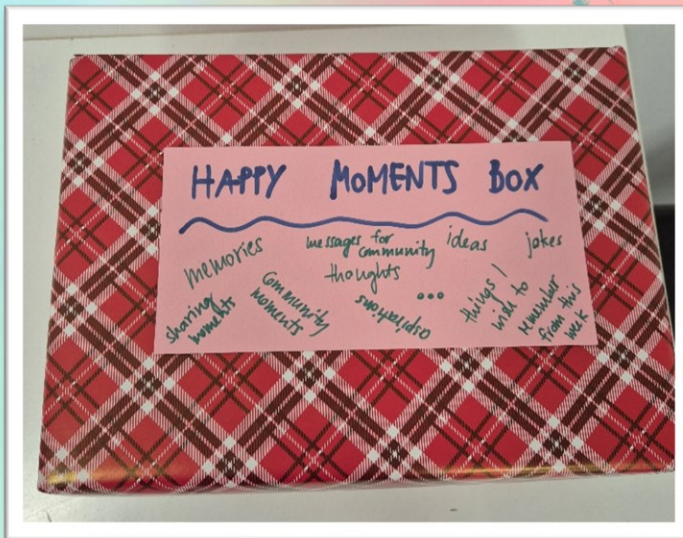
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## BUDDY SYSTEM

Through a draw, each of the participants got a buddy. During the week, the job of the participants was to give attention to their buddy, to take care of them in a way. To notice, if they are late or remind them the sessions are starting. Some activities were also more focused on talking to your buddy. One of the participants pointed this out in the evaluation about the buddy system:

*“ The buddy activity was very important to me. I feel like I’ve made a special bond with the buddy, cared for him and made me feel cared for.”*

## HAPPY MOMENTS BOX AND THE RITUAL



A strong component to building a sense of community is building rituals. **We created one on the very first day** – in a circle, every participant showed one move, and everybody repeated after them. We did this every morning as a group, repeating the moves from the first day.

In addition to this we had a happy moments box. In it we put all the lovely things that happened during the week, and we read them at the end of the training course.

# WHAT IS A COMMUNITY?

A community is a social unit (a group of people) with a shared socially significant characteristic, such as place, set of norms, culture, religion, values, customs, or identity.

**There are different types of communities:**

- formal - informal
- long term - short term
- strong - weak
- rigid - flexible
- mandatory - optional
- open - closed
- ...

In the background there is always *THE NEED TO BELONG*.

Our individual definitions of community were different but had similarities.



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# WHY DO WE NEED COMMUNITIES?

*Strong communities are the answer to big challenges of the world.*

Discussion in groups:

- Which are the big challenges of the world?
- How would you differentiate them on local and global level?
- Which are on a personal and which are of the societal level?



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## The Sustainable Development Goals

**SDGs** are a set of **17 global goals** adopted by all United Nations member states in 2015. They aim to address the world's most pressing challenges such as poverty, inequality, climate change, environmental degradation, peace, and justice by 2030. The SDGs are important because they give the world a clear plan for building a fairer, healthier, and more sustainable future by 2030. They are attempting to tackle big global challenges.



Discussion in groups:

How are communities you wish to strengthen / build / be part of connected to SDGs and addressing bigger issues?

## GROUP DISCUSSION

In a circle we shared what our insights / inspirations of the day were, what our frustrations of the day were and the remaining open questions of the day.

# INTRODUCTION OF ERASMUS+ PROGRAMS

Program to support education, training, youth, and sport in Europe.

Source: Erasmus+ Program guide <https://shorturl.at/UZ0dH>

## ERASMUS+ YOUTH

Key actions:

- Ka1: Learning mobility of individuals (TC, youth exchanges, study visits)
- Ka2: Cooperation among organisation and institutions
- Ka3: Support to policy development and cooperation

Erasmus + program Youth <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu>

## PRIORITIES OF THE ERASMUS+

- Inclusion and Diversity
- Digital Transformation
- Environment and fight against climate change
- Participation in democratic life, common values and civic engagement

## EUROPEAN SOLIDARTY CORPS

Helps young people take part in projects that benefit communities, either abroad or in their own country.

For youth between 18 and 30 looking for an opportunity to help the wider community, in Europe and beyond.

ESE projects offer an inspiring and empowering experience, as well as the chance to bring change while developing your skills and competences.

- European Solidarity Corps [https://youth.europa.eu/solidarity\\_en](https://youth.europa.eu/solidarity_en)

## IMPORTANT FEATURES

- Non-formal learning
- Voluntary Participation
- Respect for EU values
- Protection, health and safety of participants
- Multilingualism
- International dimension
- Recognition and validation of skills and qualifications
- Communicating projects and their results to maximize impact
- Erasmus+ Open Access Requirement for educational materials

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## YOUTHPASS

Tool for recognition and validation of the competence gain in NFE activities within different actions of Erasmus+ and ESE program.

## ERASMUS FOR YOUNG ENTREPRENEURS

[https://single-market-economy.ec.europa.eu/smes/learn-and-plan-entrepreneurship/erasmus-young-entrepreneurs\\_en](https://single-market-economy.ec.europa.eu/smes/learn-and-plan-entrepreneurship/erasmus-young-entrepreneurs_en)

For more information contact your National Agency.

## FOCUS ON COMPASSION

Dr. James Doty on stress and Compassion

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SDrq\\_oz\\_IMM&t=327s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SDrq_oz_IMM&t=327s)

## DEEP LISTENING

Deep listening is part of delving into your own thought path and its understanding. Practice deep listening wherever and whenever you can. Try to redirect the flow of your thoughts from yourself (what do I know, what is my answer) to the people you are talking to and to their words without a personal reaction (without jumping into the word and without solving or answering).

Exercise 1: In a conversation, let the other person finish expressing their thoughts before you answer.

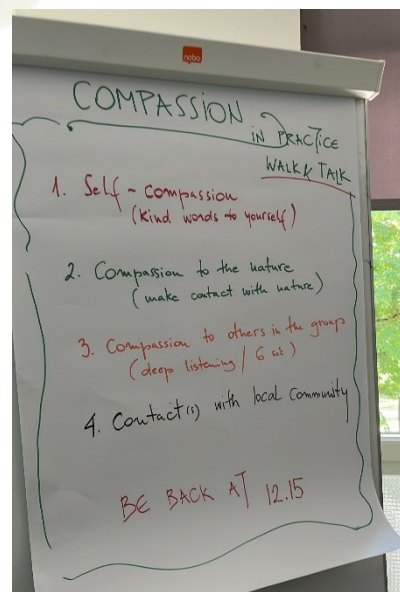
Talk about yourself for an idea, start talking about where you were born.

Exercise 2: 6 seconds

How breathing exercises can help you listen deeply and connect with yourself. Practice deep listening and connect it with the 6 second exercise. Which means you take a 6 second pause before reacting and responding to everyday situations.

You continue the conversation about yourself.

<https://ccare.stanford.edu/author/jamesdoty>



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## JOIN CITY OF LEARNING

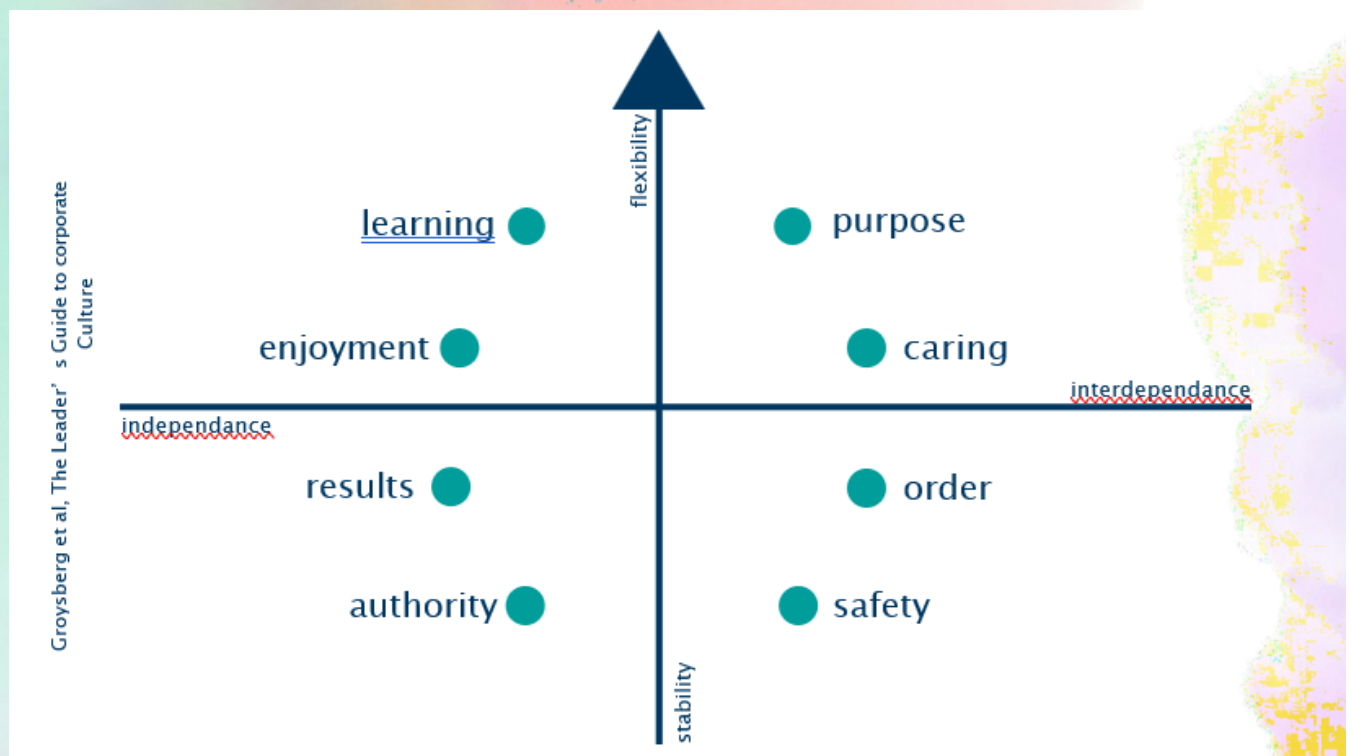
<https://global.cityoflearning.eu/en/activities/19559>

## ORGANIZATIONAL / COMMUNITY CULTURE

Culture is the tacit social order of an organization: It shapes attitudes and behaviors in wide-ranging and durable ways. Cultural norms define what is encouraged, discouraged, accepted, or rejected within a group.

- shared
- pervasive
- enduring
- implicit

(Groysberg et al, The Leader's guide to Corporate Culture)



Culture is.

If we want to build intentional community culture, it takes energy, time and effort.

Actively building a community culture = Community Keeper

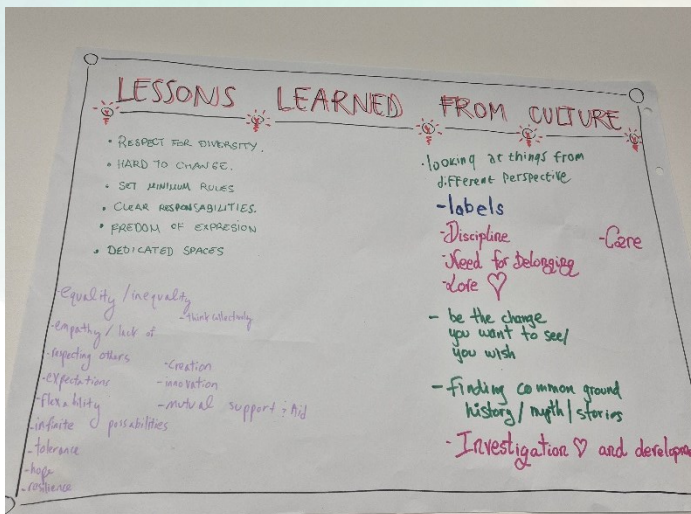
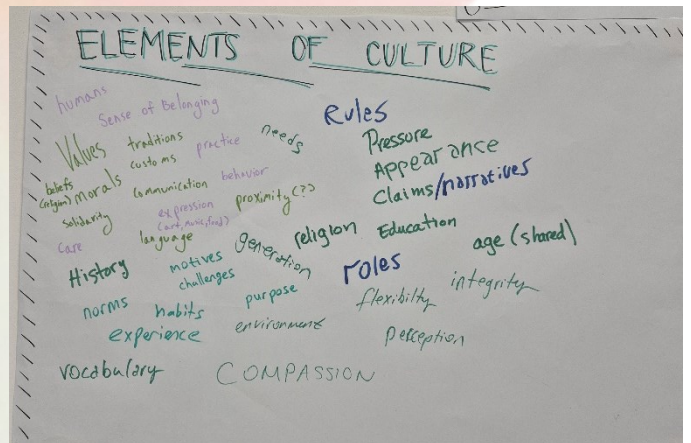
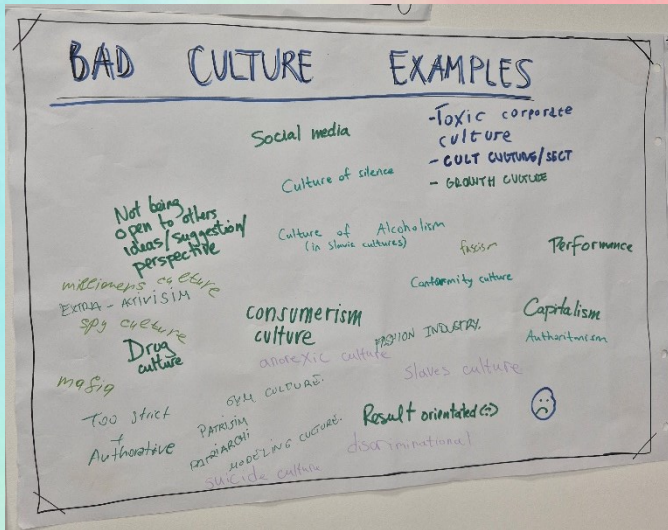
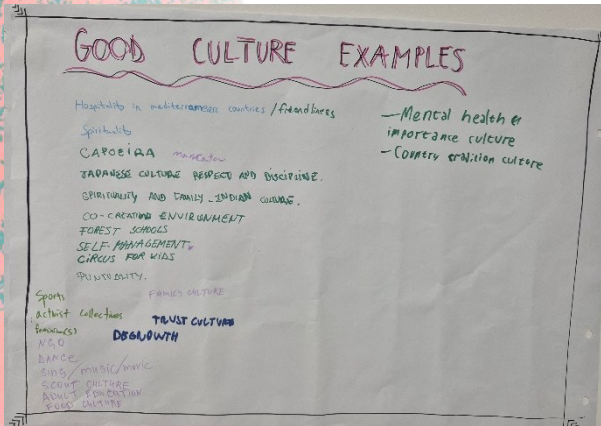
Discussion: what are your experiences with organizational / community culture?

(the good, the bad and the ugly)

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#### 4 groups - World Cafe:

- good culture examples
- bad culture examples
- elements of culture
- lessons learned



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## BUILDING OUR CULTURE

- What kind of culture do we wish to build in our communities?
- What are the pitfalls of our communities we need to be aware of?
- How can our community culture inspire and engage people?
- How can we activate the desired culture in our communities?

## RISKS OF BUILDING / KEEPING COMMUNITIES

- 1. The founder problem**  
(When the community is too dependent on its founder. If the founder leaves, burns out, or dominates everything, the community struggles to survive or grow on its own.)
- 2. Exclusion / superiority**  
(When some members feel “above others” or when cliques form, it creates barriers. Instead of being inclusive, the community becomes exclusive, pushing away newcomers or minority voices.)
- 3. Unmatched expectations**  
(Members join with different hopes, but the community may not deliver what they expect. This can lead to frustration and disengagement.)
- 4. Fear of losing members / funding**  
(Leaders may make decisions just to keep numbers up (or money coming in) rather than staying true to the community’s values. This can weaken trust and purpose.)
- 5. Leadership problem**  
(Weak leadership (too passive, unclear) or overly controlling leadership (too rigid, authoritarian) can damage both community growth and harmony.)
- 6. Organizational problems**  
(Lack of structure, poor planning, or unclear roles make it hard for the community to run smoothly. It might feel chaotic or disorganized.)
- 7. Communication problems**  
(Misunderstandings, poor information-sharing, or lack of transparency can cause conflict and mistrust among members.)
- 8. Enthusiasm burnout**  
(At first, people are very active, but over time they lose energy, especially if the workload is too much, progress is slow, or appreciation is lacking.)
- 9. Not recognizing opportunities for change / upgrade / end**  
(Communities need to evolve. If leaders don’t adapt to new needs, technologies, or realities, the community risks becoming irrelevant or collapsing.)
- 10. Not recognizing the needs of members**  
(If leadership ignores what members truly want (e.g., support, resources, belonging), people stop engaging and may leave.)
- 11. ....**

# BUILDING OUR COMMUNITY – COMMUNITY MAP

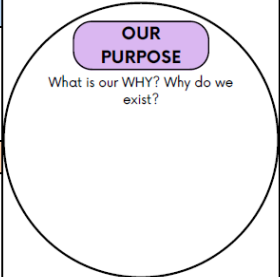
With the help of the Community map, define your community and community culture:

- name
- purpose
- values
- symbols
- stakeholders and roles
- goals
- activities
- rules and expectations
- space
- communication
- rituals
- rewards / benefits

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## COMMUNITY MAP

## OUR COMMUNITY:

<b>STAKEHOLDERS &amp; ROLES</b> Who is part of this community & what roles do they take? (founders, members, volunteers, leaders, community keepers, sponsors, supporters, ...)	<b>OUR VALUES</b> What do we believe in?	<b>OUR SPACE</b> Where do we meet, have our activities, celebrations, rituals? Who takes care of our community's space?	
<b>OUR GOAL(S)</b> What does this community want to achieve? What are specific goals of this community?		<b>OUR COMMUNICATION</b> How do we communicate in our community, which channels & forms do we use? How does communication within the community take place & how outside of the community?	
<b>OUR ACTIVITIES</b> What are the main events, activities, meetings of this community & when do they take place?		<b>OUR RITUALS</b> What kind of rituals do we use? How do we celebrate success, spend time together, come together, celebrate community members, ...)	
<b>OUR RULES &amp; EXPECTATIONS</b> Which rules do we have in place? Which behaviours do we expect & reward & from which roles? Which behaviours we don't want & (would) punish?		<b>OUR SYMBOL(S)</b> Which symbols do we use? How do we visually represent our community?	<b>BENEFITS</b> How are members & stakeholders rewarded for being part of community?

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# COMMUNITY KEEPER

What are the properties and skills of Community Keeper?

## COMMUNITY KEEPER COMPETENCE MODEL

### COMMUNITY BUILDING SKILLS

- self-awareness
- building trust
- communication
- managing conflicts
- awareness of others / empathy
- social skills

### LEADERSHIP SKILLS

- sense-making (including motivation)
- system thinking
- managing diversity
- collaboration

### PROJECT MANAGEMENT SKILLS

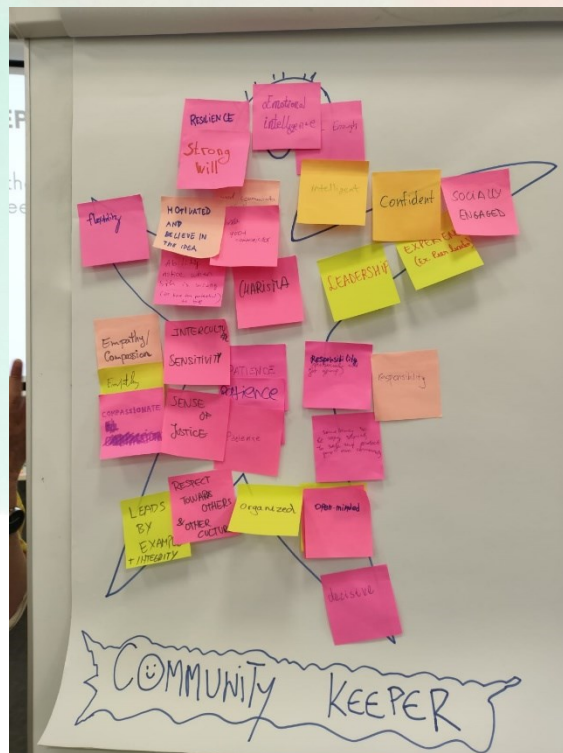
- imagination
- problem solving
- project monitoring
- strategic planning

## COMMUNITY KEEPER'S SKILLSET

How well do we do as Community Builder?

1 (no skills) - 10 (can't get better)

What skills and personality traits do we have that help us be good community keepers?



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# COMMUNITY KEEPER'S TOOLBOX

## PLAN

- identifying values, mission, vision
- setting the rules
- creating the rituals
- planning the social activities
- planning the culture system
- identifying (soft) skills development framework
- defining the roles with their rights & responsibilities
- setting up communication channels

## ACTIVATE

- social activities for meetings
- check-ins&outs, icebreakers, energizers
- rituals
- buddies & buddy surprises
- tactical groups
- dialogue groups
- values ambassadors
- gamification of membership
- community playbook
- awards & rewards for most-?members
- creating & activating group symbols
- book club / book exchange
- community celebrations

## FEEL

- online surveys & questionnaires for checking values, engagement etc.
- dialogue groups
- project groups
- community meetings
- communication channels
- conflict resolution
- planning upgrades & changes

# TOOLS SUGGESTIONS FROM COMMUNITY

## PLAN

- check lists
- SWOT analysis (Weaknesses, Threats, Strengths, Opportunities)
- Google Drive documents
- Belbin team roles test
- Community Map
- MindMap
- brainstorming
- SMART goals (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, Time-bound)
- Quality Assurance
- set a time of your day to plan
- set a time to evaluate and reflect

## ACTIVATE

- encouraging members to share their favorite activity with others
- group challenges
- creating comfy space
- sharing / bringing food
- energizers
- creating / doing a project to help environment together
- community symbol
- creating rituals together
- informal trips – quality time
- playing games together
- dancing music
- meditation – self awareness
- breath/yoga exercises

## FEEL

- anonymous exercises check in / check out
- psychological support
- sharing moments (reflection time)
- trust exercises
- feedback system – symbol – flowers – baby flower – thorns

# TOOLS SUGGESTIONS FROM YOU

## PLAN

- improve access to healthcare among highly vulnerable populations
- Slack
- defining roles, responsibilities and rights at the beginning of community involvement
- democratic assembly for discussion making 3x/week
- WhatsApp for planning and announcing
- WhatsApp community
- task delegation: social media, strategy, protest organizer etc.
- online platform for donation: solidarity for students
- training of trainers
- meditation and visualization at the beginning of the weekly meeting

## ACTIVATE

- weekly meeting
- general assembly
- community advisory board
- awareness campaign
- working groups
- engaging with local communities (for local projects)
- field assessment
- Online Film Watching
- monthly check-ins via Zoom
- monthly ritual
- protests, occupation, blockade activities
- mighty online community
- ritual: 60 min of silence every Friday
- sharing food that each participant brings (potluck)
- fundraising activities together
- reading the purpose at the beginning of each meeting

## FEEL

- non-violent communication
- Canva for posts, workshops
- regular meetings (online, virtual)
- in person meetings
- Zoom meetings
- teambuilding for bonding, board games, speed dating, group therapy anonymous
- buddy system
- workshops self-coordinated by volunteers

## THE RITUALS

Ritual is a structured sequence of symbolic actions and behaviors that hold cultural, spiritual, or social significance. It is a fundamental aspect of human experience, shaping our sense of identity, community, and connection to the sacred or transcendent.

<https://library.fiveable.me/key-terms/intro-anthropology/ritual>

In short: ritual = codified behavior

Discussion: which rituals have we established in our community?

### the value of rituals:

- increase connection
- feeling of control in uncertainty
- reduce stress and anxiety

## HOW TO DESIGN A RITUAL?

### • The purpose

Why: what does it encourage, solve - motivation, connection, energy level, fun, ...

### • The format

How: when, what, who: what are the rules of the game

### • The name

What do we call it?

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# HOW TO DESIGN A RITUAL?

1. identify the purpose (what is your wish, problem you wish to solve, why do you need it)
2. brainstorm on ideas “how to ...”
3. create the ritual & its name

## EXAMPLE:

1. identify the purpose: people are not following the rules we established
2. brainstorm on ideas: how to make exposing rule-breaker more fun and less judging?
3. create the ritual & its name

**purpose:** someone doesn't follow a rule

**format:** we all dance around the rule-breaker and put a line on the board – if they have 5 lines, they must do a favor for all team members

**name:** rule-breaker dance

**outcome:** people feel empowered to point out their and others' mistakes in an open and accepting environment

What kind of rituals does your community

- have?
- need?

=> *design a new ritual for your community*

## YOUR STORIES

- find your host case you want to work on
- find your working space
- host presents the case
- share, brainstorm, discuss, solve the problem, design new rituals, solutions, ...

## WRAP-UP

### THE TOPICS:

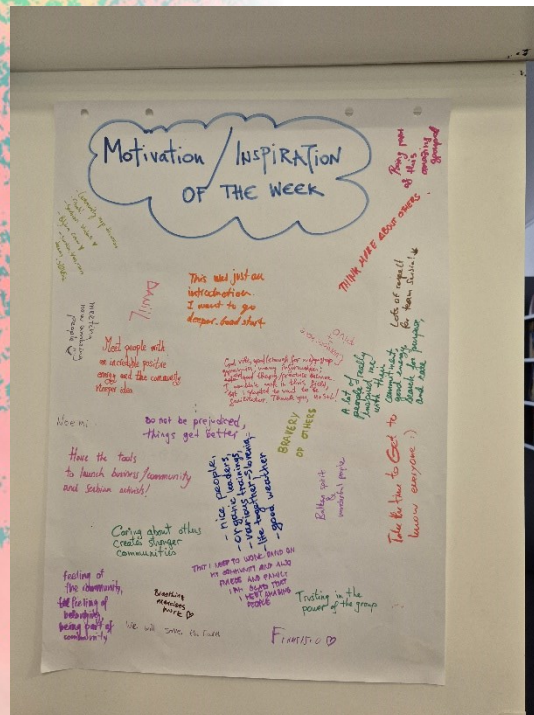
- community
- compassion
- organizational / community culture
- community map
- community keeper
- toolbox
- rituals

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## LESSONS LEARNED

group discussion:

Top 3 lessons learned, conclusions, insights of the training



"ALONE, WE CAN DO SO LITTLE; TOGETHER, WE CAN DO SO MUCH."

HELEN KELLER



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