The Leap Ambassadors Community support team: A Case Study

Note: Your community might not have the same team structure as the Leap Ambassadors Community, but these behaviors and activities work, regardless of team size.

Communities like ours—a private community, based on a shared interest—need help to evolve and grow. While many communities operate with volunteers or a single administrator, the Leap Ambassadors Community was supported from the beginning by a team of paid professionals who had experience related to our community's mission. While letting the community members lead the direction and set the pace, the Leap support team helped facilitate community growth, discussions, activities, and member participation.

A crucial component of the Leap support team's engagement strategy is to designate a team member, known as a Team Member Assigned (TMA) to each ambassador. The TMA's primary responsibility is to keep up with assigned ambassadors and their work through calls, emails, and other sources of information (e.g., LinkedIn, Twitter, organization e-newsletters, etc.).

Connecting with new ambassadors begins with the onboarding process. The Leap support team conducts onboarding calls 30-90 days after an ambassador has joined the community. During the onboarding discussion, the TMA's goal is to hear about the ambassador's experience with the online community, learn more about the ambassador's work, share the community's products, and connect the ambassador with other community members.

The onboarding call allows the TMA to re-emphasize the community's minimum expectations and acknowledge the ambassador's participation to date. For example, if the ambassador posted to the online forum and there were few responses, the TMA would ask if and from whom the ambassador received direct responses. When the TMA acknowledges the ambassador's participation, it's key to remind the ambassador that the Leap support team isn't assessing their participation. The team simply keeps track of each ambassador's involvement to help determine if they're engaged and gauge whether to adjust engagement opportunities.

An internal Slack channel keeps the team abreast of an ambassador's accomplishments. The team records updates to an ambassador's information (e.g., job or position changes, address updates) in Salesforce so every team member can stay up to date.

Team members intentionally engage ambassadors through emails and phone calls to learn what's valuable to ambassadors and what they want from their online community experience. TMAs help ambassadors explore specific ways to benefit, such as identifying a professional challenge when it could be helpful to request the community's input. One example of how an ambassador can derive value is the request for advice on how funders should compensate stakeholders for their time, an emerging practice which several ambassadors had experienced. This is also one way that the Leap Ambassadors Community adds value to the field, by sharing these and other insights to a broader, external audience.

The Leap support team offers multiple ways for ambassadors to make internal and external connections to others. The internal connections give ambassadors the opportunity to learn about those who do similar work. Building and maintaining relationships with ambassadors help foster engagement on the online forum (i.e., email communication via Google Groups), which tends to be the launching board for other types of participation. The team also fosters external community connections to amplify ambassadors' voices. The team also uses social media platforms, particularly LinkedIn and Twitter, and occasional external email blasts to feature ambassadors' work.

The Leap support team strives to create a community culture that allows for a cohesive and productive experience for ambassadors. To accomplish this goal, the team has to be versatile. For the Leap support team, this means that any team member, for the most part, can help support the community at any moment. Being adaptable also means that the team doesn't operate in a hierarchical structure. The versatility encourages cross-training among the team members, so there aren't any hold-ups when one team member is out or deployed on another project.

Leap support team members prioritize responsiveness to meet ambassador needs, including responding to individual emails within 24 hours or less, actively monitoring the online forum, and determining the next steps as appropriate. The team also reaches out to ambassadors and encourages them to answer unanswered questions on the online forum if the question is aligned with their area of expertise.