

AUSTRALIAN  
COMMUNITY  
MANAGERS

STATE OF  
COMMUNITY  
MANAGEMENT

2022

MAJOR PARTNER



higher logic

SUPPORTING PARTNER





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## FOREWORD

### Welcome to the sixth annual career survey of practitioners of online community management in Australia.

Despite a challenging 2022 in so many ways, community managers are reporting stable salaries, recovering budgets and a greater sense of optimism than recent years. There are also welcome personal rewards - more community managers feel understood and valued, and a growing number are optimistic about the profession.

This year we have introduced an additional question on moderation, to understand the issues affecting online community managers in more detail. Though the usual suspects (trolling, hate speech, defamation) are present, it is the “small stuff” - general social conflict and microaggressions - that dog community practitioners most commonly. Misinformation has also emerged as a key concern for community managers, getting in the way of their goals and creating issues amongst their members. We intend to commit more research to the above areas in 2023.

As an organisation in 2022, ACM held a record number of events and training sessions for our network, consulted on new digital legislation, and held our 11th annual Swarm conference, bringing together online community builders and managers from around Australia and the world for five days of learning and networking.

At Swarm we announced a new initiative - **All Things in Moderation** - the world's first dedicated conference for the craft of online moderation. This event will unite practitioners across industries, policy makers, researchers and more in May 2023, and will complement our new moderation training resources (also launching in 2023).

My thanks once again to our industry research partner, Higher Logic. Their continued support of this important survey is invaluable, and reflects their commitment to community managers and the value their work can generate for organisations. Thank you also to social media agency Quiip for their sponsorship of this 2022 report and their support of the industry overall.

### Venessa Paech

Director, Australian Community Managers  
Wadawurrung Country



## FOREWORD

### Over the last few years, we have seen first hand the impact community can have on your business goals. And we don't see that changing as we go into 2023.

The ACM State of Community Report and Higher Logic's own research - Annual Community Predictions eBook - supports the contention that long-term business success will be increasingly attributed to community so long as a more holistic approach to the value of community to a business is taken.

We've noted with excitement the transition of customer experience to being led from a customer success perspective, beyond just support, and community has been a strong influence on this shift.

Equally exciting is the number of community-focused roles being intentionally hired for in the market. Finally, there is recognition of the competency and skill sets required to be a successful community manager; and, the impact this will have on a business' goals when managed well.

Higher Logic is extremely proud to continue its support of Australian Community Managers. In doing so, we value the opportunity to learn from

you all so that our solutions are positioned as genuine opportunities to help, not just viewed as another addition to a tech stack. We feel strongly that we earn the opportunity to sell into the market only when we support the very profession itself.

ACM's ongoing research into the sector and profession is becoming increasingly important so we encourage you all to share with your network the opportunity to get involved. Join ACM, contribute to the body of knowledge, connect with peers and participate in the research. When ACM shines, we all shine.

### Robert Barnes

Country Manager - APAC, Higher Logic  
Sydney, Australia  
Gadigal Country



# RESEARCH BACKGROUND & PURPOSE

## The 2022 ACM State of Community Management report addresses:

- The demographics of Australian online community managers
- Their working conditions and contexts
- Their toolsets and industry relationships
- The nature of the communities they build and oversee
- How community management is framed and integrated into Australian businesses and organisations
- Key challenges and concerns for community practitioners
- Moderation challenges and practices
- Future trends

Launched in 2015, the annual ACM State of Community Management Survey is the only benchmarking data captured about online community management in Australasia. The survey is a resource for community managers (both professional and volunteer), recruiters and employers, journalists and media, policy makers, researchers and anyone looking to improve their understanding of online community management as a field of work in Australia.

## Methodology

This survey was conducted online from September 1 2022 until November 1 2022, and was designed to take approximately 15 minutes to complete. There were 115 respondents in total. Anyone who manages an online community in Australia, in any context, was encouraged to participate.

It was circulated via the Australian Community Managers professional organisation and online group, emailed to ACM members directly, and promoted through social media channels and individual professional networks.

The survey consisted of 54 questions, including core questions asked year-on-year throughout the life of the survey to allow benchmarking. Additional questions are added each year in relation to key issues or trends. Most questions were binary or checkbox answers, with a handful of long-form questions intended to gain insights into participants' personal views on the industry. No personal details were collected to preserve anonymity and integrity of response.



# KEY FINDINGS

The average salary for community professionals is **\$100–\$130k p.a.**

**36%**

of community practitioners are over the age of 40

**43%**

of online community practitioners say their role is understood and valued



The three top industry sectors investing in online communities are **Health, Government and Technology**



**73%**

of community professionals are tertiary qualified



**78%** of community managers conduct post-moderation and reactive moderation in their communities



Victoria is the centre of community management

**61%**

of community professionals work for a single business or organisation while only 2% work in an agency

**47%**

of community managers have been working in community for at least five years

Online community managers are **72% female**

**50%**

are optimistic about the future of community management

**47%**

of community managers work to a strategy

**73%**

of community practitioners work outside a traditional office



**93%**

of community managers invest in further education

Knowledge building or sharing is the leading purpose for online communities



**\$5m**

4% of online communities that make money are generating more than \$5m annually for their organisations



**25%**

of community managers deal with misinformation as a key moderation issue

**NFP/Social Cause, Media, and Government**

are the leading sectors hosting online communities in Australia



**35%**

of Australian communities have been active for five years or more

# DEMOGRAPHICS: WHO IS MANAGING YOUR COMMUNITIES?

## GENDER

**A technology space led by women.**

Female

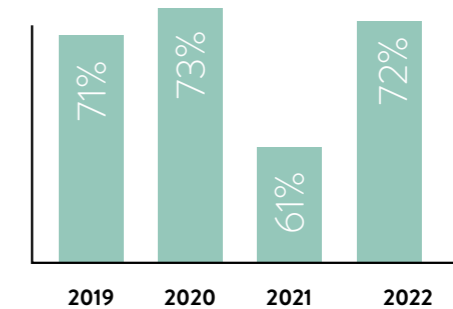
Male

Female 72%, Male 21%, Non-conforming 2%

Women have dominated the community building and community management space in Australia since this annual industry research began in 2015. 2022 is no different, with 72% of respondents identifying as female. This is up from 2021 (61%), and in line with 2020 (73%).

Male community managers have fallen year-on-year from 21% to 18%.

**Females in Australian community management**

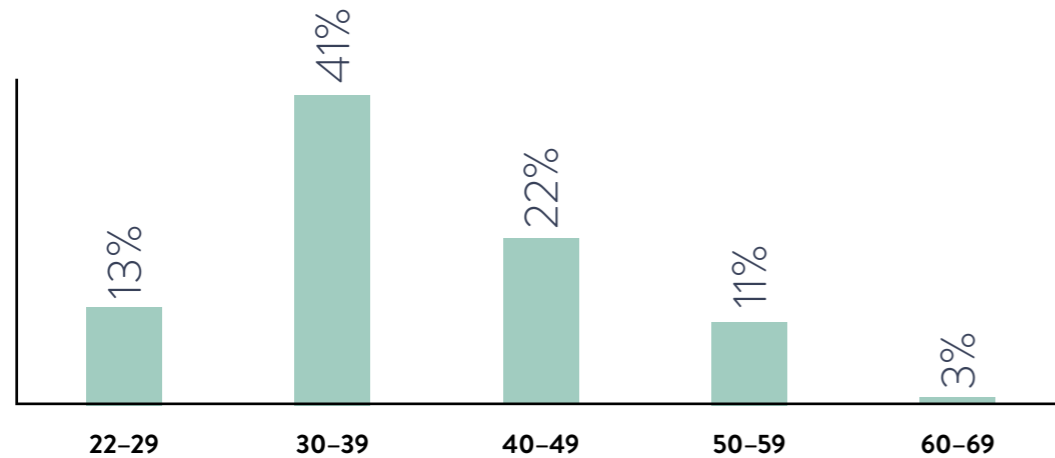


ACM aims to conduct more focused research into gender and community management practice in 2023, to better understand this pattern, and how to best support building a diverse practitioner base.

As in 2021 and 2020, 2% of respondents identified as gender non-conforming. We acknowledge that comfort levels vary around disclosure of gender identification, and this may influence these results. Representation in community management helps create safe, empathetic and contextually relevant community governance.

# AGE

## Will there be opportunities for a maturing workforce?



Between 2015 and 2021 this research revealed community management in Australia dominated by practitioners aged 22-39.

This window appears to have shifted, with 30-49 year olds now the primary players. This is likely a combined effect of the growth in intermediate roles in the space, and residual impacts of the pandemic, which saw a spike in demand for talent capable of gathering, mobilising and moderating groups, networks and communities across disparate digital platforms.

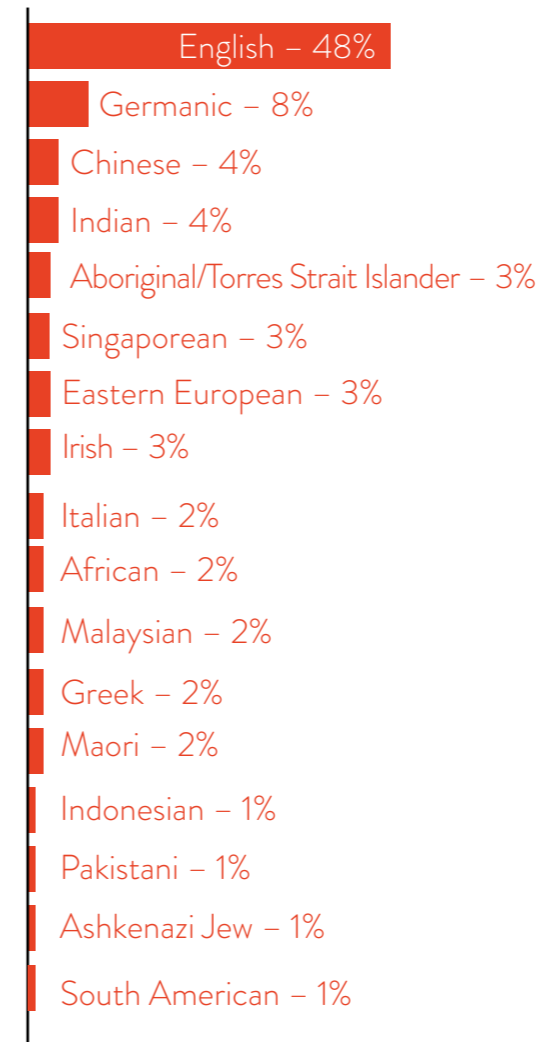
The number of community managers aged

50-59 years has seen a small increase from 6% in 2021 to 11% in 2022, while community managers aged 60-69 held firm at 3% year-on-year.

Without senior community roles (such as departmental heads or C-suite) there are limited options for community experts who wish to invest in a longer career within the discipline. Anecdotally, mid-career community managers with 10+ years in the space, are often seeking alternative or adjacent disciplines in the absence of a suitably senior community opportunity.

# ANCESTRY

## Online community management in Australia is primarily white.



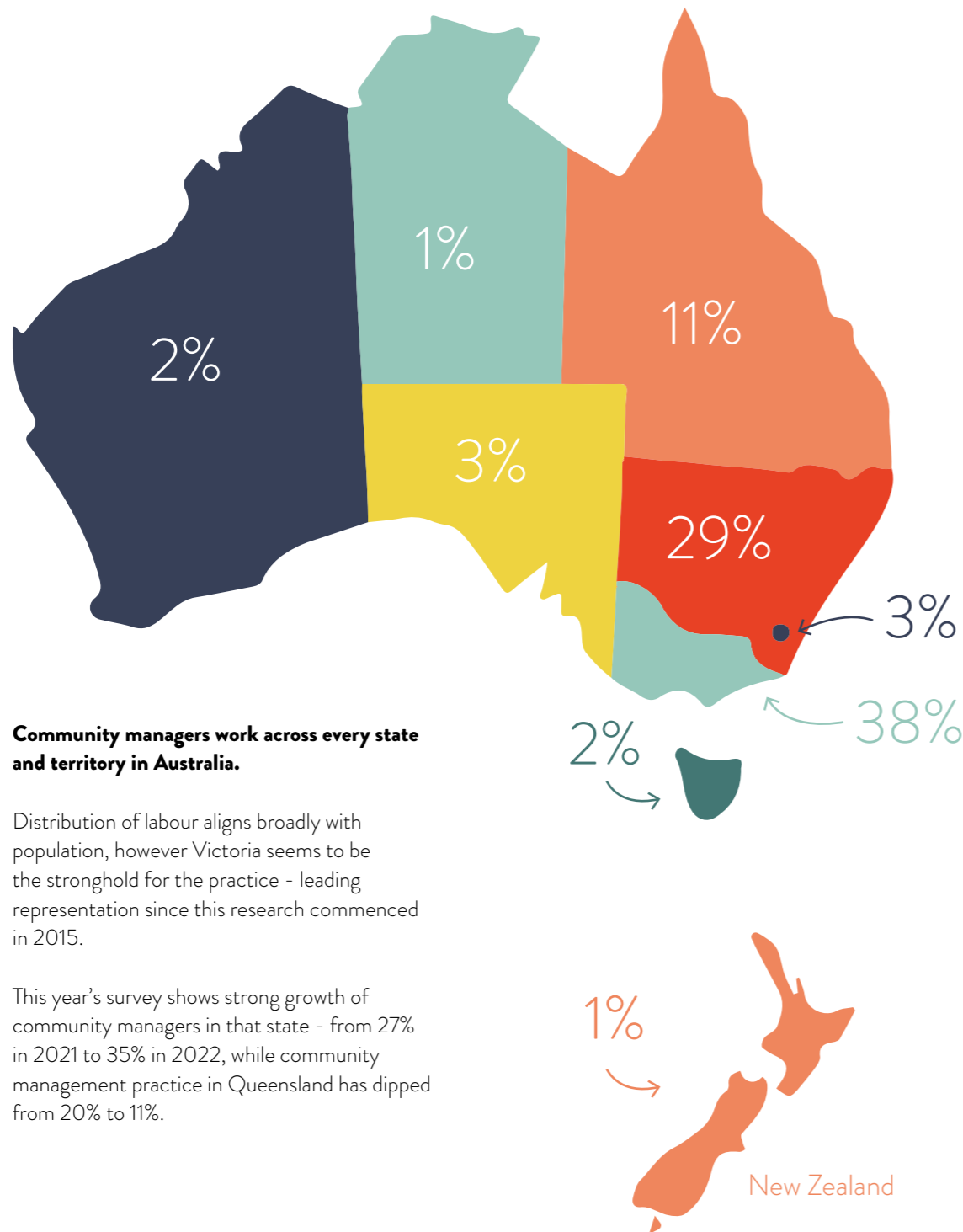
Starting in 2020 ACM has collected this data on ancestry and cultural identity (optional for participants), to continue to inform our understanding of the ethnic and cultural diversity of those managing Australian communities.

The ethic or cultural background of a community practitioner may seem irrelevant, but it can influence both conceptualisation of community and approach to governing inclusive spaces, among other factors.

Respondents were given a list of detailed geographic and cultural groupings and had the freedom to add their own or augment to best reflect how they identify.

Community management remains predominantly white and of European ancestry. There has been a small rise in the number of community practitioners identifying as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander (3% - up from 2% in 2021).

# LOCATION



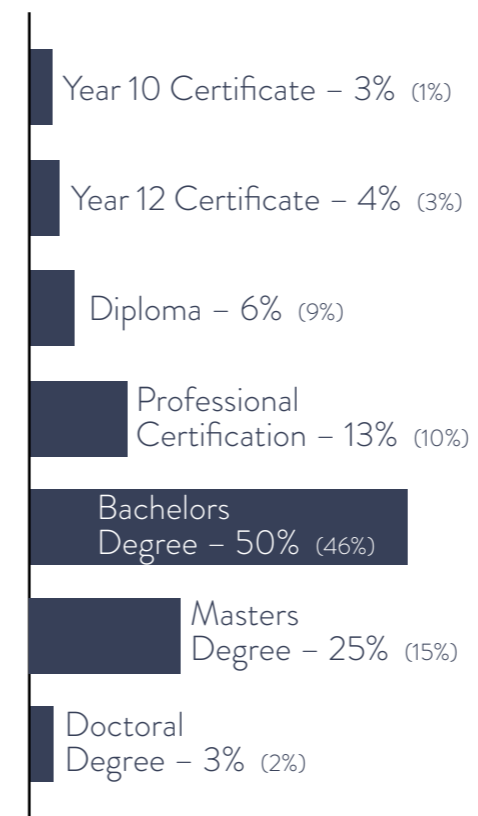
## Community managers work across every state and territory in Australia.

Distribution of labour aligns broadly with population, however Victoria seems to be the stronghold for the practice - leading representation since this research commenced in 2015.

This year's survey shows strong growth of community managers in that state - from 27% in 2021 to 35% in 2022, while community management practice in Queensland has dipped from 20% to 11%.

# EDUCATION & TRAINING

**73% of community professionals are tertiary qualified.**



The educational background and experiences of Australian online community professionals remains relatively consistent with previous years. There has been an increase in the number who are tertiary qualified (73% in 2022 to 63% in 2021), with a Bachelor's (Undergraduate) degree the most commonly completed. Professional Certification continues to grow as a way to obtain specific training in community management areas (such as strategy, moderation or operations).

- 
- Media & Communications – 30%
  - Social Sciences – 18%
  - Marketing – 14%
  - Creative Arts – 14%
  - Journalism – 12%
  - Business/Economics – 12%
  - English Literature – 12%
  - Psychology – 10%
  - Languages – 7%
  - History – 6%
  - Education – 5%
  - Design – 5%
  - Law – 5%
  - Life Sciences – 4%
  - Earth Sciences – 4%
  - Social Work – 4%
  - Public Relations – 4%
  - IT/Computer Science – 3%
  - Philosophy – 3%
  - Religion/Theology – 3%
  - Health – 3%
  - Medicine – 3%
  - Advertising – 3%
  - Tourism/Hospitality – 3%
  - Physical Sciences – 3%
  - Politics – 2%
  - User Experience – 1%

Media and communications and social sciences still lead the way as the most common study background for those working in community management in Australia. In 2022, marketing has fallen from 23% to 14%, and information technology/computer science has also decreased from 10% to 3%. Most other areas performed consistently year-on-year.



# USEFULNESS OF EDUCATION

Most respondents found their formal education 'somewhat useful' in their community practice - 43% (down slightly from 2021 at 47%). There is a noteworthy increase in those who have found their formal education was 'very useful' in community management - from 17% in 2021 to 29% in 2022.

The top three fields studied by those who said their formal education was "very useful" were: Media and Communications, Social Science and Psychology. Psychology has outpaced Journalism in 2022, which historically has ranked in this top three grouping of 'very useful' areas of study for community managers.

Of those who completed tertiary education, 94% of respondents who held a Master's described it as 'very useful', while 45% of those who held a Bachelor's Degree reported it as 'very useful'.

19%  
Not very useful

43%  
Somewhat useful

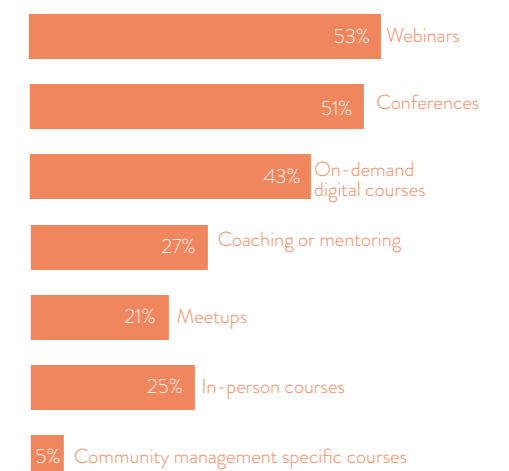
29%  
Very useful

# ONGOING LEARNING & PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

## Community professionals favour digital education.

93% of community managers responding to our survey have taken on some kind of ongoing learning or professional development in the last 12 months.

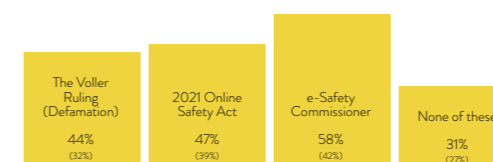
Webinars and conferences are once again the most popular sources of this learning. On-demand digital courses have seen a sizable increase in 2022 - up from 33% to 43% - while coaching/mentoring has seen a small decrease. The number of practitioners taking in-person courses has risen slightly year-on-year, as COVID restrictions have lifted.



## Regulatory awareness

Community managers are being asked to take on a growing regulatory role in their work, necessitating awareness of key digital legislation (such as the Australian Online Safety Act). In 2021 we began polling this awareness to help us provide resources and training that can close any gap between knowledge and compliance responsibilities.

More respondents are cognizant of the Voller Ruling, which established new precedent in the way they must manage potentially defamatory content within their online communities; the 2021 Online Safety Act, which has implications for community platform owners, community managers and community members; and the role of the e-Safety Commissioner in administering the Act, and as a safety educator and advocate more broadly.



We're pleased to see this work paying off, with increases in awareness amongst community managers across the board.

There was a small increase in respondents not yet aware of these factors. This correlates with those reporting they are newer to online community management (less than one year).

# TENURE

## 47% have been working in community 5+ years

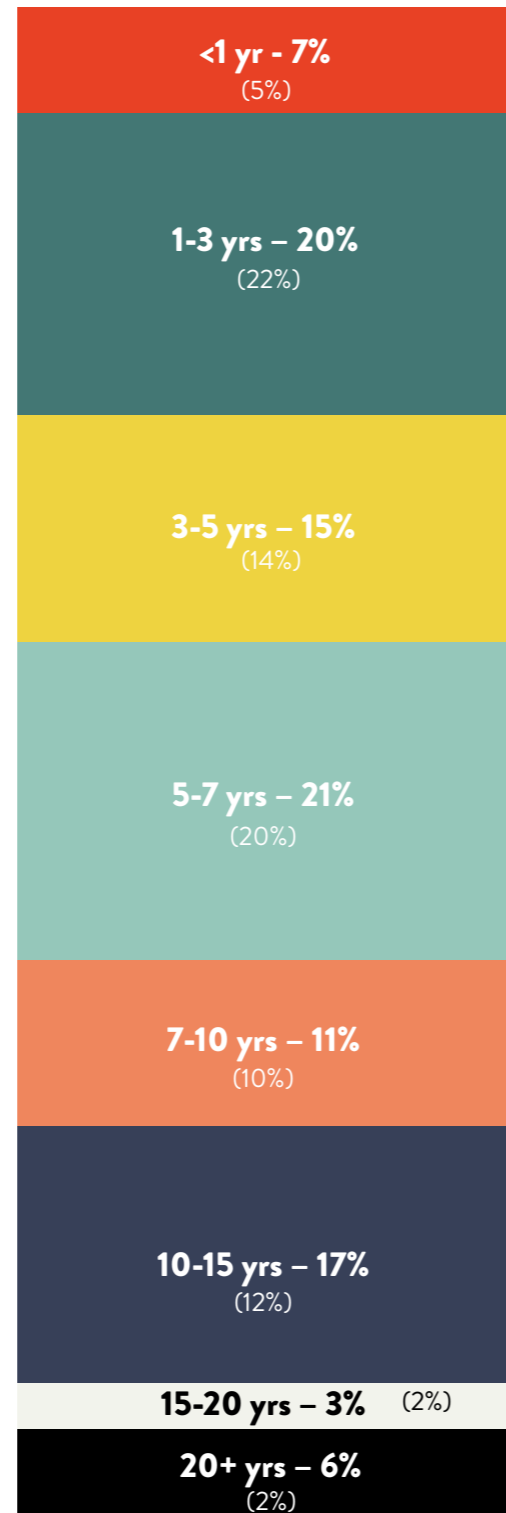
Community management continues to mature as a professional discipline.

In line with 2021, a majority of survey respondents have been working in the field for more than five years (47%).

Of those new to community management:

- 17% report making a career change from something else
- 10% are new graduates entering the professional marketplace
- 5% took up community management in addition to other roles/work

There has been an increase in those working in community management between 10 and 15 years, and over 20 years - both positive signs that the practice is retaining talent as they grow into more senior or specialised roles.



# WORKING LIFE

This section offers insight into the working lives of community professionals, including their salary and titles, team make-up and environment and how their practice is understood and valued.



# SALARY

## Community manager compensation remains strong.

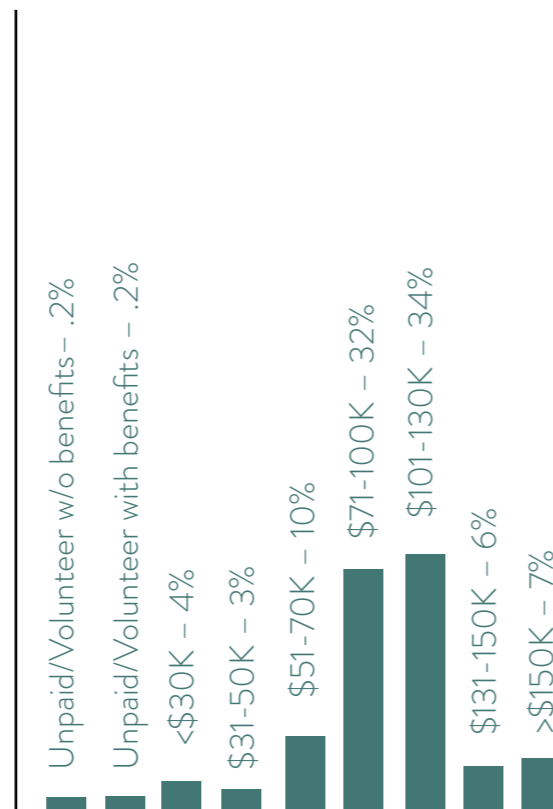
In 2021 the average salary for community managers in Australia stepped up a bracket from \$71,000 - \$100,000 per annum (where it stayed from 2015-2019), to between \$100,000 and \$130,000 annually.

Despite challenging economic times nationally and globally, this has held for 2022, with 34% of survey respondents reporting salaries in this range - on par with 2021.

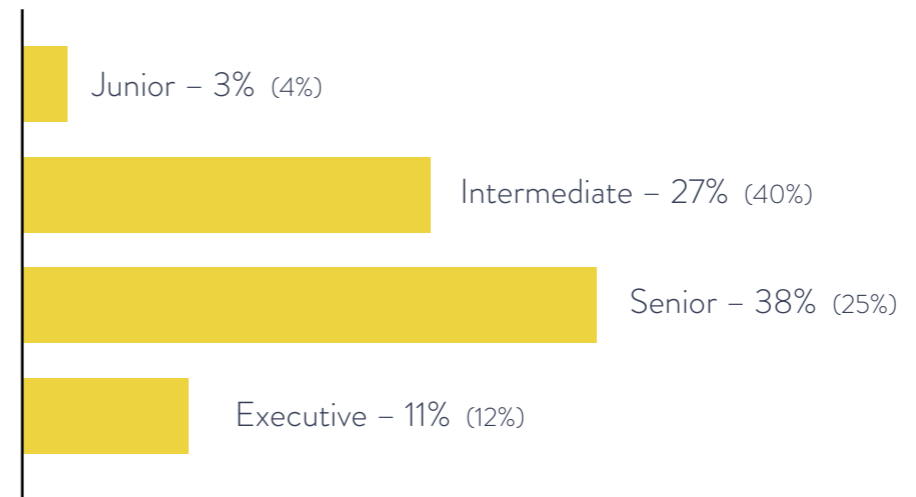
There has also been a jump in the number of community managers making \$71K - \$100K per annum - from 29% in 2021 to 32% in 2022. The number of community professionals making between \$131,000 and \$150,000 annually has nudged upward from 5% to 6%, and the number of community managers making over \$150,000 annually has risen from 5% to 7%.

The highest paying sectors for online community professionals are once again: Health, Government and Technology. This has remained consistent since 2019 and reflects greater regulatory and moderation demands of health and government communities, and technology companies investing in communities as a growth driver or support mechanism.

To capture more nuance around those working in an unpaid capacity, this year the survey asked community managers to report if they were nonsalaried but received other types of benefits or perks (such as free products or services). In 2021 4% of survey respondents nationally said they engaged in unpaid or volunteer community management work. This year that figure is consistent, with 2% reporting no salary but some other form of benefit, and 2% reporting no salary or additional benefits.



# POSITION & TITLE



Most survey respondents hold intermediate or senior roles within their organisations or community settings. Senior roles have increased year-on-year - from 25% in 2021 to 28% in 2022, aligned with the decrease in Intermediate roles (40% to 27% year-on-year).

Junior roles have fallen slightly - from 4% to 3% - continuing a downward trend across the past few years of this research.

We asked people to name their job title - 45 different titles were shared

56% of titles shared had the word 'community' in them, an increase on 2021 (44%) and 2020 (21%). This suggests a growing understanding of community management and the allocation of community specific resources.

Here are some of the titles respondents named

**Community  
Manager**

*Customer  
Community  
Specialist*

**FORUM MANAGER**

**Head of Community**

**SOCIAL MEDIA MANAGER**

**Community Lead**

**Engagement Manager**

*Membership  
Manager*

**HEAD OF  
SOCIAL**

**Moderator**

Social Media & Customer  
Experience Manager

*Experience  
Manager*

**Community  
Operations  
Manager**

**DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY**

**Online Community  
Manager**

# WORKING STATUS

## Outsourcing remains in decline.

Community management can be conducted by in-house professionals, agencies or individual freelancers.

The number of community managers working via agencies in Australia has been consistently in decline, with those roles moving to in-house hires. In 2022 the gap has increased even further: 61% of community managers now work in-house for a single organisation, while only 2% work in an agency setting.

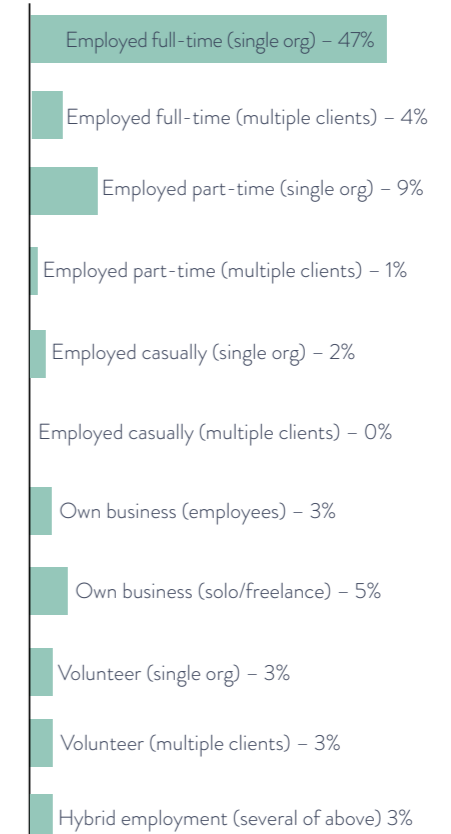
Of the 61% working for a single business or organisation, 47% are employed full-time by that organisation (consistent with 2021). There has been a small year-on-year increase in casual employment for community managers for a single organisation (from 0% in 2021 to 2% in 2022).

In-house working for single business/org 61%



Agency working on single client 1%  
 Consulting/Consultancy for multiple clients 7%  
 Consulting/Consultancy for single client 1%  
 Freelance working for multiple clients 3%  
 Agency working on multiple clients 1%

Employment Status

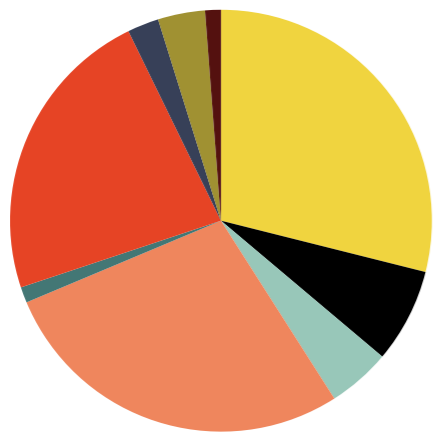


# TEAM MAKE-UP

## Small teams lead the pack.

The majority of community professionals in Australia work in small teams focused on community, consistent with recent State of Community Management Surveys.

The number of community practitioners working alone with their community has reduced year-on-year - from 30% down to 20% - suggesting small teams are on the rise.



- On a small professional team 24%
- On a large professional team 6%
- On a small volunteer team 4%
- I'm the only one (professional) 23%
- I'm the only one (volunteer) 1%
- Manage a small professional team 19%
- Manage a small volunteer team 2%
- Manage a large professional team 3%
- a large volunteer team 1%

Notably, there has been a fall in solo volunteer community management (from 7% to 1%). Though we can't be sure what is driving this, it is likely a combination of pandemic related fatigue, and the transitioning of some volunteer roles to paid roles.

The number of community professionals managing a team is on par with 2021 (25%), though there has been a slight decrease in those managing large professional teams (from 6% to 3%).

### Where are they located?

The distribution of community teams has remained consistent with 2021, with negligible rises (1% or under) in each category.

- Distributed globally 18%
- Distributed nationally 20%
- Same location as you 25%

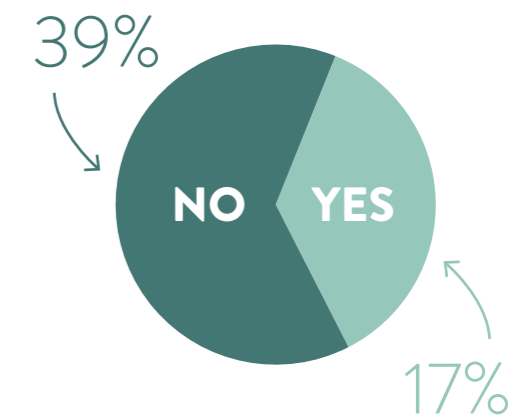
# ROLE OF THIRD PARTIES

Following an increase in 2021, there has been another rise in the percentage of community practitioners working with external consultants or agencies on moderation (from 8% to 13%).

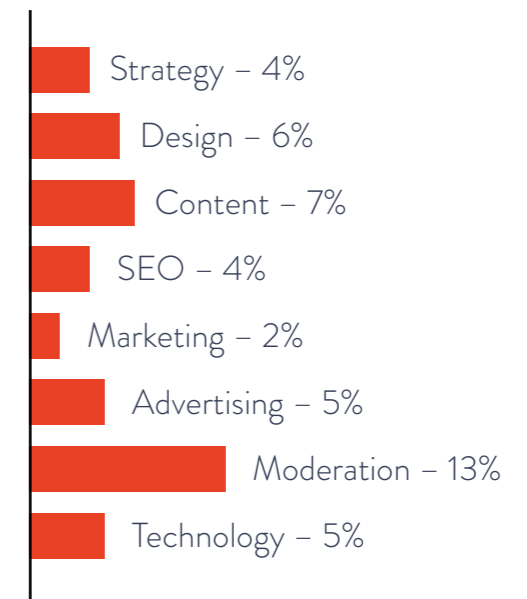
We expect this to continue as organisations with a rapidly evolving digital risk landscape.

There were small increases in those obtaining design, content, SEO and technology support.

If you work in-house, do you work with agencies or consultants on your community?



### What areas do third parties work on?



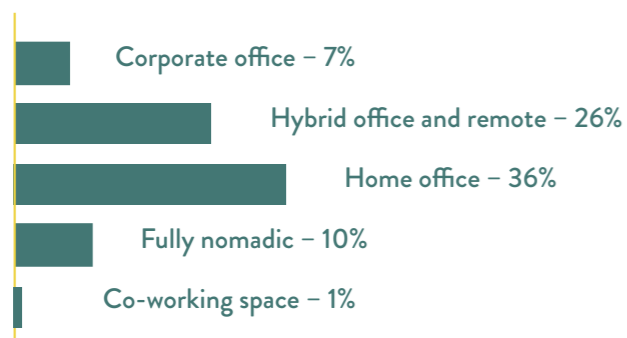
# ENVIRONMENT

## Remote work is the new normal - and community managers lead the way.

The amount of community practitioners working outside a traditional office has jumped significantly year-on-year - from 51% in 2021 to 73% in 2022. This follows pandemic spawned increases in both 2020 (49%) and 2019 (37%) The number of community managers working in a traditional office has halved yet again - from 30% in 2020, to 14% in 2021 and now 7% in 2022.

Working remotely, whether at home, while travelling or in a hybrid context (mixing occasional office time with remote time), has firmed as the definitive new normal for community management practitioners.

This is broadly in line with national research, which shows that remote and hybrid working is here to stay post-pandemic. However, community managers seem to be leaders in the new working world. A survey conducted in March 2022 by researchers at Swinburne University found fewer than a quarter of knowledge workers returning to a daily office commute, with the majority (44%) utilising hybrid work arrangements. Community practitioners are more likely to work fully at home, or travel while working, rather than spending any days in the office.



# NUMBER OF COMMUNITIES

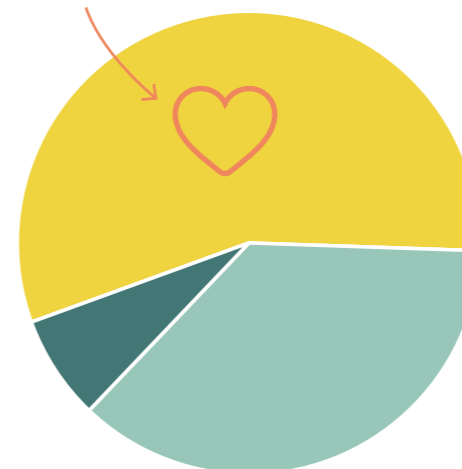
## 15% of community managers work on more than one community at a time.

Approximately 15% of community managers work on more than one community at a time (up from 10% in 2021). The majority of those in this category are working on **two to five** communities.

Two respondents reported working on more than 20 communities, which is typically unconstructive and unsustainable.

# VALUE & UNDERSTANDING

My role is understood and valued 46%



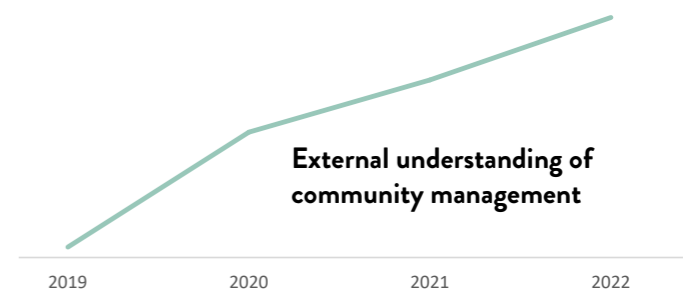
My role is partly understood and somewhat valued 30%

My role is not well understood and not valued 6%

## Understanding around community management is growing.

In 2019 only 2% of Australian community managers said they felt their role was understood and valued. This has ballooned in 2022 to an impressive 46%.

While there is always further to go in building understanding around communities and community management, this demonstrates great strides across the last few years - in part supported by the pandemic necessity to shift engagement online.



# KEY CHALLENGES

**Stakeholder understanding and mental health are key concerns.**

The leading challenges for community managers are support and understanding from leaders and stakeholders, measuring the value of their communities, and personal mental health and wellbeing.

*“Less than 10% of the company know about our online community.”*  
*“Burnout is massive. The hours worked, the battles fought, and it’s never-ending.”*

This is consistent with 2021 data, however leadership support specifically has risen to the top of the challenges list.

*“We lack the resources to operate [community management] at a level I would be satisfied with. Only recently have leadership become interested in supporting us so we can create and maintain strategies with reporting and ROI. We are so short staffed we are flying by the seats of our pants out here.”*

*“Execs have a lack of understanding of our community. Those involved in the build 8 years ago are still living in that stage of community.”*

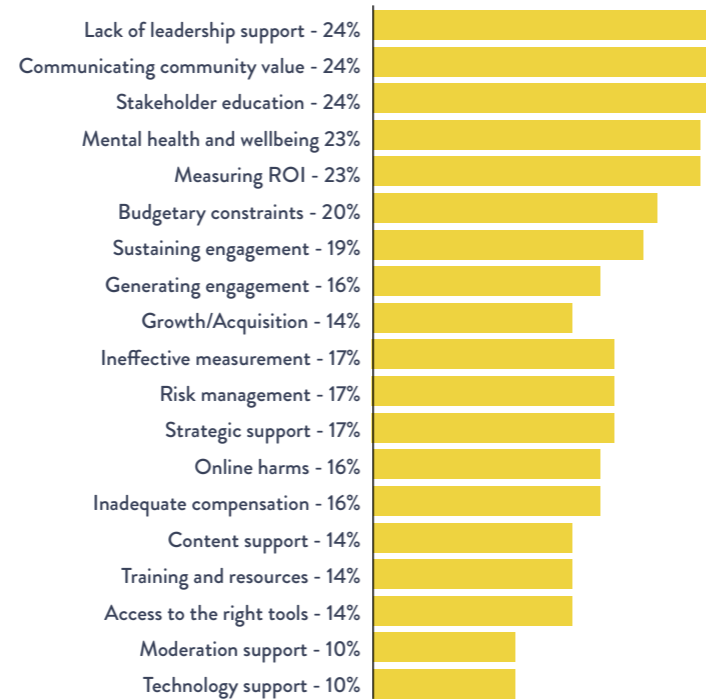
*“Lack of understanding means we often don’t engage as well as we could.”*

ROI remains a leading issue raised by respondents, with practitioners struggling to measure and communicate community value.

*“The perennial problem - what metrics are actually valuable, and how trustworthy are they?”*

*“It can wear you down to have change at executive level and once again have to demonstrate the return on investment in community.”*

*“Tools in platforms are not the best and don’t measure what my community needs.”*



Budgetary constraints have also increased as a challenge year-on-year, with more community managers describing pressure to do more with less.

*“We are a new community led start-up with zero budget, asked to accomplish the impossible.”*

*“If your wage is considered expensive - imagine asking for money for training.”*

Sustaining engagement has seen a small increase from 14% to 19%, while acquiring new users/ members has jumped from 7% to 14% year-on-year.

*“There’s too much competition and users are exhausted. I feel like social media is getting less popular, and maybe after the pandemic people are looking for more.”*

# BENEFITS OF WORKING IN COMMUNITY

**Community professionals are relationship motivated.**

*“It remains a privilege to manage a community full of wonderful people generously sharing their time, experience, knowledge and expertise to help others.”*

We asked community practitioners to tell us what they most like about their work. Their responses fell into the following three themes:



Community professionals in Australia are driven by creating impact in ways that make the most for their members and organisations.

Importantly, that impact is relational - creating or facilitating trust, belonging, collaboration and needs fulfillment, among others.

They also benefit from feeling this connection, and they appreciate work that is evolving and challenging to them in diverse ways.

Here are some selections of respondent comments:

## Connection

*“Connecting with community members and hearing their stories.”*

*“Building communities. People becoming more connected and less isolated as a result. The whimsy and curiosity that can develop in trusting communities.”*

*“Witnessing meaningful human connection form.”*

*“Building relationships and connections with all stakeholders involved in any community I’ve worked or volunteered in over my career. These relationships have been my greatest source of growth as a person and a professional over my career.”*

## Impact

*“Seeing the tangible benefits experienced by our members.”*

*“Creating safe spaces for all voices to be heard, and effecting change in member’s lives and in society.”*

*“I really love the communities with a social purpose.”*

*“Knowing that vulnerable participants feel safe, seen and validated. Their contact with us (me) may be the first thing that has empowered them to seek professional help after 20+ years.”*

*“Being in a position to share insights from our community internally which influences design is great.”*

## Variety

*“The variability of work, roles and applications. Every legitimate community professional I meet has a different story and work life.”*

*“It’s constantly evolving and a great channel for creative problem solving.”*

*“It’s about people, so it’s different every day - that’s good and bad!”*



# ABOUT OUR COMMUNITIES

This section explores the make-up of the communities managed by community professionals in Australia; their strategic role, the platforms and industry sectors they occupy, their success measures and allocated budgets.



## TYPE OF COMMUNITY

### Communities of practice dominate in Australia

There are five primary types of community:

- Interest (such as a brand, fan or product community)
- Location (such as a neighbourhood community)
- Circumstance (such as a community of support for those with a shared condition or life experience)
- Practice (such as a learning community); and
- Action (such as an activist community or social movement)

Some communities share aspects of multiple types, though there is usually a dominant type.

To better capture the range of communities in Australia and the discrete purposes they serve, this year we asked survey participants to name their primary community type.

Most community managers are working on communities of practice (35%) and interest (24%).



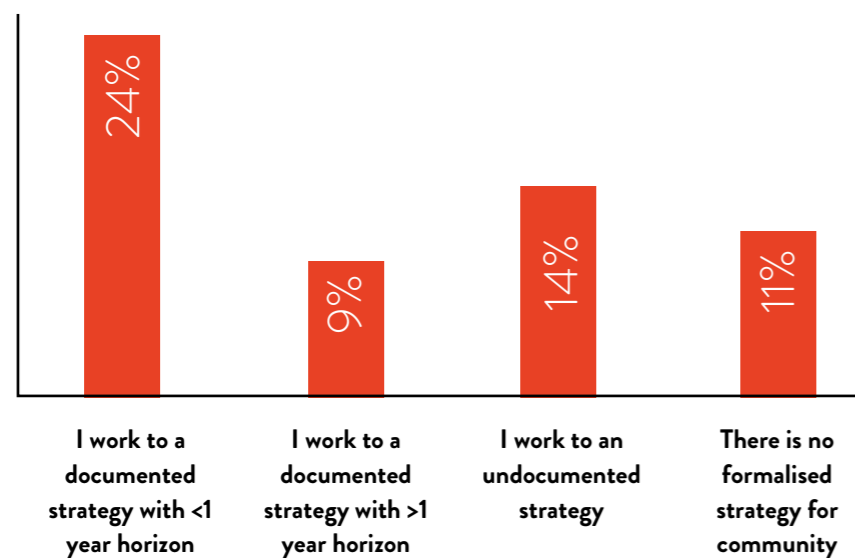
# STRATEGY

## How do we overcome strategic inertia?

47% of community managers are working to some form of strategy, up slightly from 2021 (45%). Once again, a smaller portion have this plan formally documented (33%), and 11% report not having a strategy - figures both on par with 2021.

For those working in community professionally, a lack of formalised strategy can have significant implications, and contributes to recognition and reward of community management labour. If a community carries commercial goals, a strategic plan is essential for calibrating and measuring effectiveness.

Against the backdrop of a maturing global community management space it is concerning so many community managers are working without a strategic plan.



# RELATIONSHIP TO COMMUNITY

To understand how organisations think about communities strategically, we asked participants which of these statements

best described their organisation's current relationship to community.



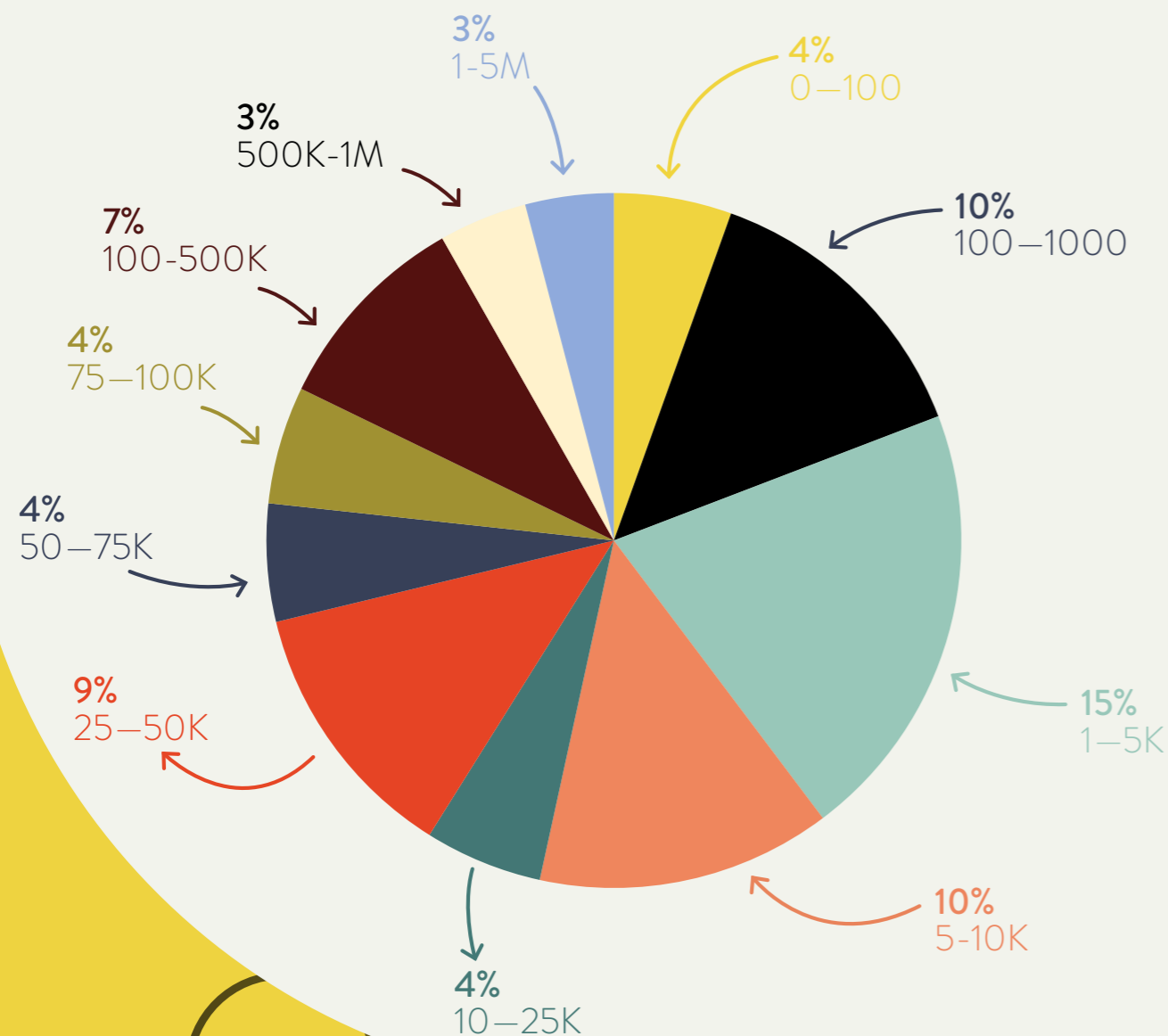
# SIZE

## Smaller communities are the norm

39% of online communities in Australia have fewer than 10,000 members - with 4% reporting less than 100.

34% have more than 10,000, while only 3% have more than 1 million members in their ranks.

27% of respondents reported that they weren't sure of their community membership numbers and hadn't obtained a recent count.

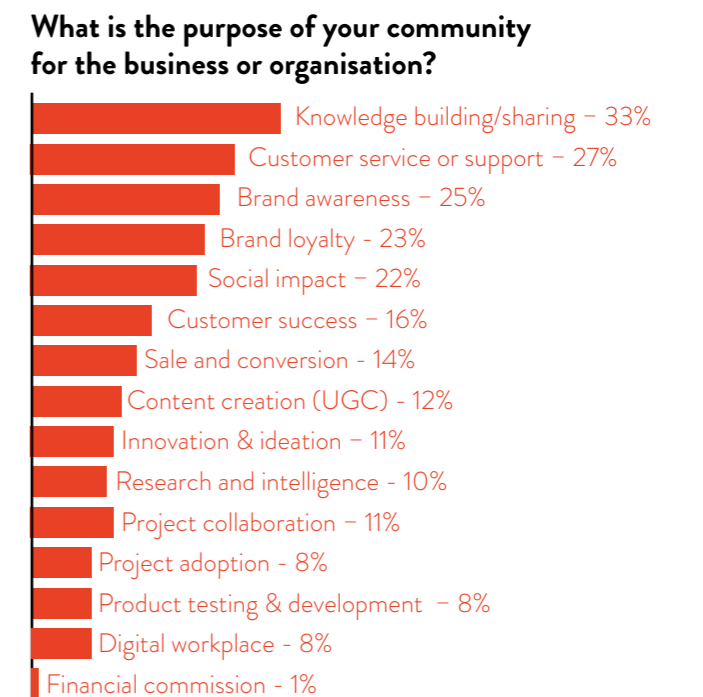


# PURPOSE

## The top 3 organisational purposes for online communities in Australia are: knowledge building/sharing, customer service and support, and brand awareness.

Brand loyalty, social impact and customer success are also popular reasons for organisations to invest in community.

### What is the purpose of your community for the business or organisation?

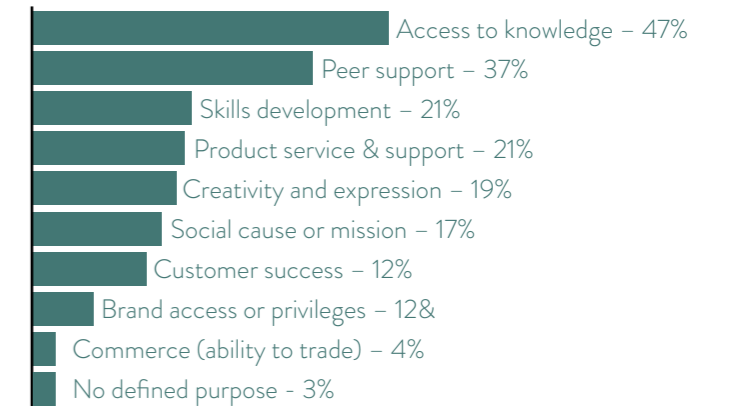


Access to knowledge is the leading driver for members accessing Australian online communities canvassed in this survey (maintaining 47% year-on-year).

Peer support is the second most popular purpose for members at 37% (consistent with 2021). Customer success has risen from 12% to 18% year-on-year, and creativity and expression has also risen from 16% to 19%. Access to brand privileges has decreased from 12% in 2021 to 8% in 2022.

Peer support is the second most popular purpose for members at 37% (consistent with 2021). Customer success has risen from 12% to 18% year-on-year, and creativity and expression has also risen from 16% to 19%. Access to brand privileges has decreased from 12% in 2021 to 8% in 2022.

### What is the purpose of your community for your members/users?



# BENEFITS OF COMMUNITIES

This year we introduced a new question asking community managers to specify the benefits their communities were generating (for any stakeholders, including members).

We ask this in an effort to understand the way community practitioners frame and articulate value in their work, and to begin mapping any trends in community benefits across sectors. Are benefits aligned to those communicated by organisations? Are there critical gaps?

The results demonstrate a diverse array of benefits - both commercially and interpersonally oriented.

Improving sentiment around the hosting organisation was the leading benefit reported, followed closely by helping members succeed (at a task, process or practice), building new knowledge and creating belonging and safety for community participants.



# PLATFORMS

## Facebook Groups in decline?

We asked community managers which platforms they use to build and maintain their communities.

Email is still the lynchpin of many communities at a commanding 29%. The top three licensable platforms to host an owned community are Higher Logic/Vanilla, Discourse and Salesforce (Lightning Communities).

Khoros has regained some market share (from 4% to 5%), while Mighty Networks has fallen in

popularity (down from 5% to only 1%). The use of a custom build platform has increased from 3% in 2021 to 5% in 2022.

In social media, Facebook still dominates platform usage overall, however use of Groups has declined year-on-year from 29% to 17%. The other significant mover is TikTok, falling from 24% to 10% after a surge in 2021.

In the enterprise space, Zoom and Slack are the two most popular platforms for convening communities. Use of Facebook Workplace has declined year-on-year. 12% of community managers said a platform migration for their community is expected within the next 12 months, up from 10% in 2021.

## Which platforms does your community use?

| Owned                  |     | Social Media         |     | Enterprise         |     |
|------------------------|-----|----------------------|-----|--------------------|-----|
| Email                  | 29% | Facebook - Pages     | 30% | Zoom               | 30% |
| Higher Logic (Vanilla) | 10% | Facebook - Instagram | 27% | Slack              | 13% |
| Discourse              | 10% | Twitter              | 25% | Microsoft Teams    | 4%  |
| Salesforce             | 7%  | YouTube              | 17% | Yammer             | 2%  |
| Mighty Networks        | 2%  | Facebook - Groups    | 17% | Facebook-Workplace | 2%  |
| Khoros                 | 5%  | TikTok               | 10% |                    |     |
| Custom built platform  | 5%  | Discord              | 9%  |                    |     |
|                        |     | Reddit               | 6%  |                    |     |
|                        |     | LinkedIn Groups      | 6%  |                    |     |
|                        |     | Twitch               | 5%  |                    |     |
|                        |     | SinaWeibo            | 3%  |                    |     |
|                        |     | Patreon              | 2%  |                    |     |
|                        |     | WeChat               | 2%  |                    |     |
|                        |     | substack             | 2%  |                    |     |

# PLATFORM RELATIONSHIPS

**The relationship between community teams and platforms is all important.**

Since 2019 we have asked community practitioners to describe their relationships with the platforms they work with..

2022 responses fell into four main themes: relevancy, transparency, support and collaboration.

The themes are consistent year-on-year, and reflect a power imbalance, particularly with social media platforms. Some community managers have reached a tipping point with their frustrations:

*“Given up (on Facebook). Everything is difficult and an unknown quantity.”*

Relevancy

Transparency

Support

Collaboration

## RELEVANCY

Respondents expressed frustration with toolsets that don't serve their community type or needs, and expressed a desire for more contextually relevant affordances.

*“Decisions on platforms are made internationally. Australia is a satellite and often excluded from decision-making around platforms.”*

*“Better community-specific analytics, it's one size fits all.”*

## TRANSPARENCY

Community managers report feeling out of the loop, chasing changes to algorithms and other platform features that impact their work.

*“Constant changes that aren't communicated well, FAQs are not updated to reflect changes, no access to sector experts to assist.”*

*“More transparency over algorithms.”*

*“Transparency over internal processes so that we can work alongside them, rather than against their processes.”*

## SUPPORT

Community managers want more ways to ask for and receive help with technical and cultural issues on their platforms.

*“We need more ways to request help and actually speak to humans.”*

*“It's impossible to ask for help unless you're paying to play. Even then it's uphill.”*

## COLLABORATION

Community practitioners want to see their platforms as an ally interested in collaborating with them, but instead they feel disempowered..

*“We would like our platform provider to be a more proactive partner and bring ideas and functionality from best-in-class examples of other communities for us to implement or learn from.”*

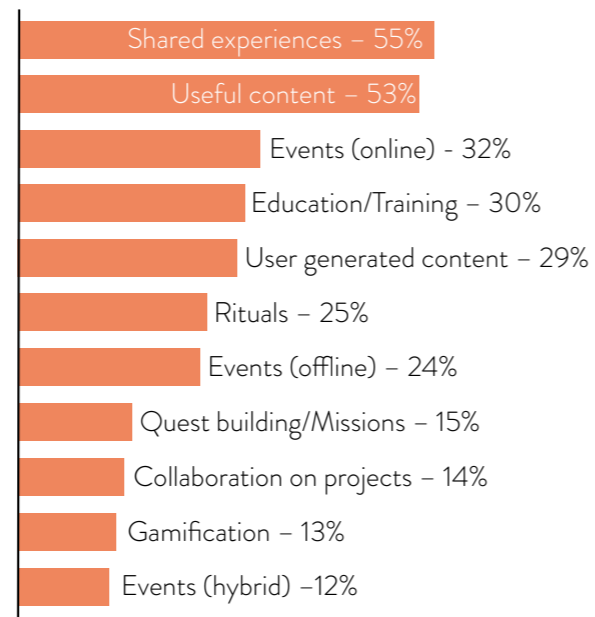
*“We need help to keep up with everything.”*

# ENGAGING COMMUNITIES

Community managers use a multitude of engagement techniques and practices. This year we asked a more detailed question about engagement to understand the span of approaches and their perceived effectiveness.

We provided a list of common techniques and asked respondents to indicate which they use on a regular basis.

Shared experiences, needs-meeting content created by community owners, and online events are the most common approaches to engage community members. Hybrid events (12%) were the least popular, after gamification (13%).



# MODERATING COMMUNITIES

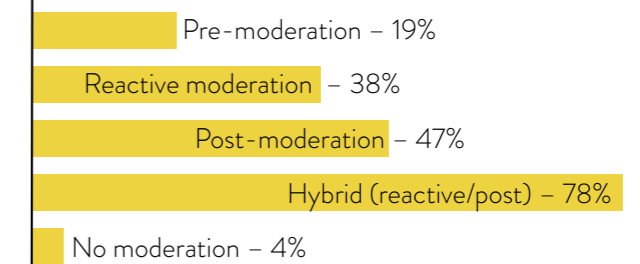
Moderation is an important part of online community management, necessary to both guard against risk and incentivise constructive participant behaviours. In Australia it is also a regulatory must, as community owners (including non-professionals) in many cases take on liability for the actions of their users.

We polled practitioners to understand the preferred types of moderation being conducted.

Most community managers working online use a combination of post-moderation (where content and behaviour is reviewed systematically after users post to the community), and reactive moderation (where content or behaviour is brought to the community manager's attention via user reports or another mechanism).

Respondents reported that use of pre-moderation (where content is reviewed prior to being published live) was up year-on-year - from 14% to 19%. As pre-moderation indicates endorsement of content, it can be a high-risk approach for the Australian landscape. Additionally, it can slow down conversational flow and stymie engagement between users.

4% of respondents are not conducting moderation in their communities, up 2% from 2021, putting the health of their communities at risk, and opening themselves up to potential liability.



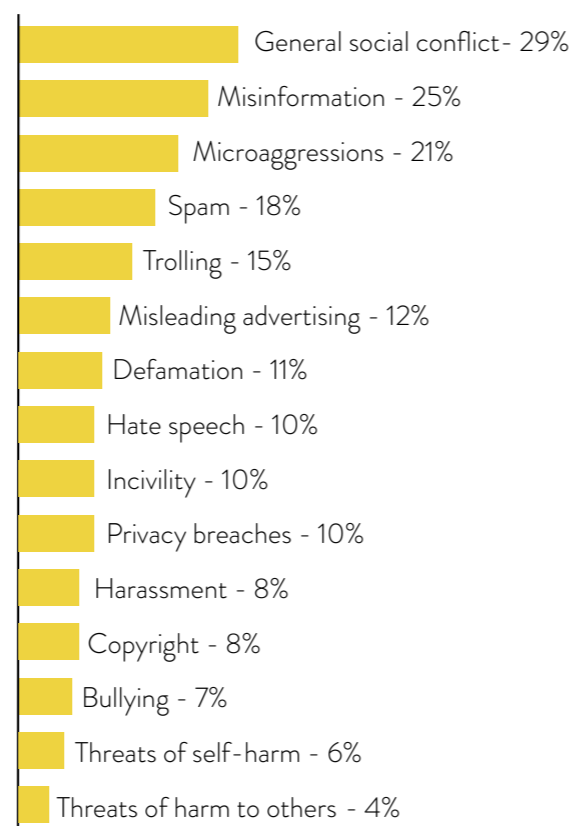
# MODERATION ISSUES

As moderation is central to online community management and an increasingly important concern, this year we asked survey participants to shed light on the most common moderation issues they are dealing with.

While 'big' issues such as hate speech, harassment, defamation and copyright breaches often dominate discussions around risk in digital social settings, respondent data reveals what community practitioners have long discussed anecdotally - that the 'small stuff' is more common, and if left unchecked can lead to more serious problems.

General social conflict (29%) is the leading moderation issue reported by online community managers, with microaggressions not far behind at 21%. Misinformation is the second most common issue (25%).

Notably, respondents reported dealing with threats of self-harm more than threats of harm to others. Even if a community is not specifically focused on mental health, members who feel safe in a specific environment may be more likely to reveal vulnerabilities. Community managers are often asked to manage threats of self-harm across diverse community contexts and settings, and it's critical they are equipped with the support structures and resources to meet these challenges.

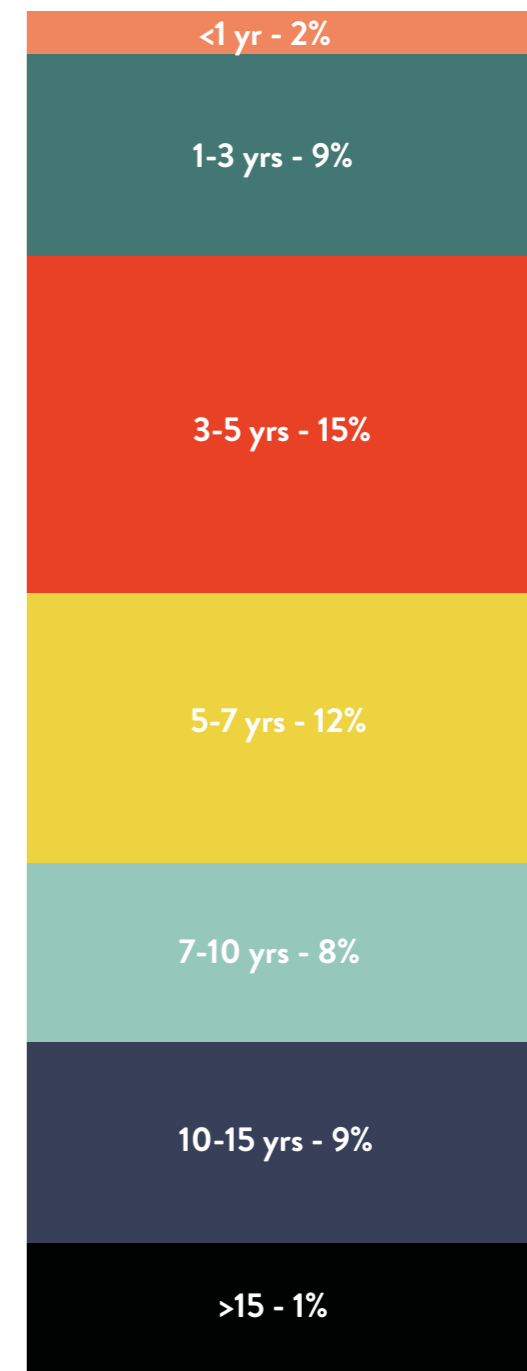


# AGE OF COMMUNITY

## Communities continue to mature.

In line with 2021 results, the majority of Australian online communities - 35% - of Australian communities have been active for five years or more. 2021 was the first year since this annual research commenced that this was the case; a maturity milestone.

Communities aged 3-5 years increased from 7% to 15% year-on-year, suggesting most communities are surviving the critical thresholds of their initial few years. Community life-cycle research shows that most communities require at least 2-3 years before maturity, and need skilled, consistent community management to sustain over time.



# INDUSTRY SECTOR

## Our communities make a difference.

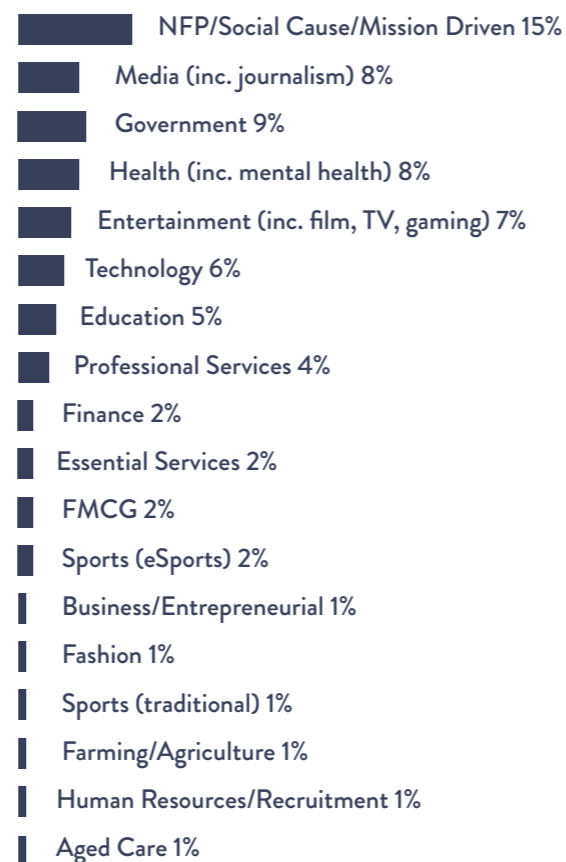
Not-For-Profit (including social cause and mission driven organisations) are down slightly from their 2021 total of 17% to 15%, but are still a clear leader in terms of community focus.

Government once again places highly, (it has consistently ranked in the top three sectors hosting online communities in Australia), while communities in the media space have fallen from 14% to 8%. Health remains strongly represented - falling from 9% to 8% year-on-year.

New in the mix for 2022 are Human Resources, Aged Care and Essential Services, with respondents registering from communities across these three sectors.

38% of community practitioners are subject matter experts (SME) in the topic or area of their community (e.g. education, gaming) while 36% are not SME and have been hired primarily as community management knowledge holders. This split is consistent overall with 2021 data, with a small drop in the number of community managers holding SME (41% to 38%).

Subject matter specific knowledge can be decisive in community management success in some circumstances, providing community staff with credentialing and social capital, and useful insights around relationships and information management.



# BUDGETS

## Community budgets are recovering.

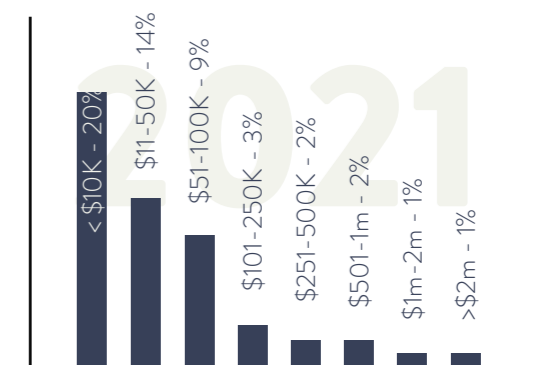
Despite challenging economic times and staffing pressures, community operating budgets have taken a turn from 2020 and 2021 - with all but one budget bracket showing slow but steady gains..

The number of budgets in the range of \$11,000 to \$50,000 has increased from 14% to 16% year-on-year. Those between \$101,000 to 250,000 have increased from 3% to 8%, while \$251,000 to \$500,000 have risen from 2% to 6%.

On the high end of the scale, we've also seen increases: budgets between \$1 million and \$2 million are up from 1% to 2%, while those above \$2 million annually have stepped up from 1% to 3%.

The three top industry sectors investing in online communities are once again: Health, Government and Technology. This is consistent across the last three annual State of Community Management Reports.

## What is the annual budget for community operations in your organisation (exc. staff)?





# MEASURING COMMUNITIES

Measures most commonly used by community managers  
Ranked most used to least (1 is most used)

- |                           |                            |
|---------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. Social impact/outcomes | 6. Knowledge generation    |
| 2. Conversion to member   | 7. Quality of interactions |
| 3. Social sentiment       | 8. Discussion ratios       |
| 4. Acquisition            | 9. Net Promoter Score      |
| 5. Traffic/Downloads      | 10. Cases/Issues resolved  |

Measures will vary according to type of community (e.g. customer service communities may not measure social impact but will certainly capture cases resolved).

Given the prevalence of social impact communities in Australia, it makes sense to see this measure rank as the most popular. Social impact can also be framed as generating tangible value in outcomes for members or participants.

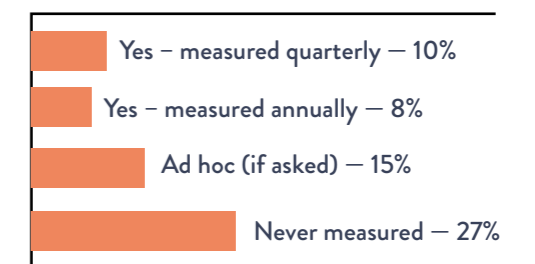
Only 3% of respondents report using community health checks such as the Sense of Community Index (SCI) to measure the social and cultural health of their communities. This is down from 60% in 2021. It's difficult to know why this is, but economic pressures, newer community managers less familiar with the concept of community health or its metrics may be a factor.

# ROI & ECONOMIC VALUE

In 2021 we introduced two questions concerning Return on Investment (ROI), to understand how this is captured, and for those measuring financial ROI, how valuable their communities are to their organisations. This leads us toward an Australian economics of community.

Consistent with 2021 data, a majority of respondents are not measuring Return on Investment for their community at all. This is most commonly due to a lack of time, training or resources. However capturing community value to members or a hosting organisation (whether commercial or not), is an effective way to validate community management practice and build support for increased investment or resources.

**If your community is for a business or organisation, do you measure the ROI (Return on Investment) of your community - and how often?**

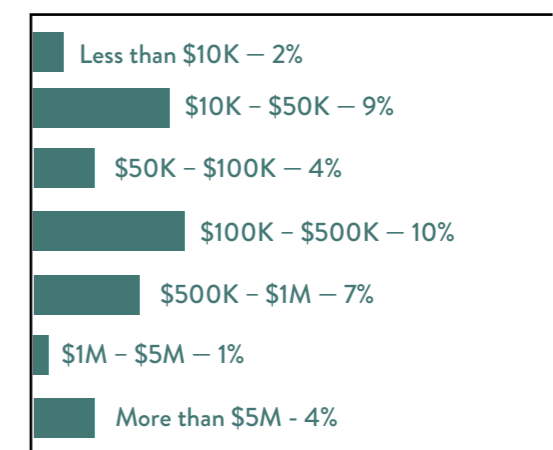


## Community worth to an organisation

The majority of communities generating financial impact for organisations are making them between \$100,000 and \$500,000 annually.

The number of communities generating more than \$5 million annually has seen a small increase year-on-year - from 3% to 4%.

**If you are measuring ROI in dollar terms, how valuable is your community to your organisation (annually)?**

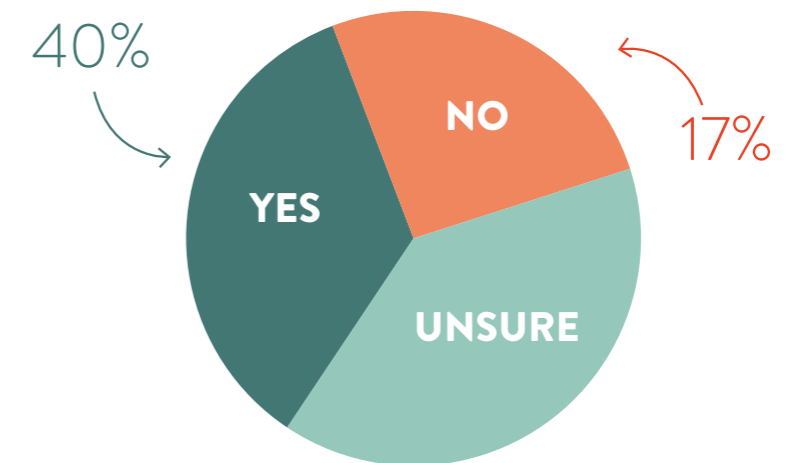


# THE FUTURE



## FIVE YEARS TIME — 2027

**Do you think you'll still be working in online community management in 5 years time?**



40% of survey respondents say they expect to be working in community management across the next five years - an increase of 9% year-on-year.

Of those who said they don't envision being in community management in five years, the most common reason cited was undervaluing community management as a discipline..

*My current role is a good fit for me. But community isn't really valued at my org which doesn't make me feel valued in this space.*

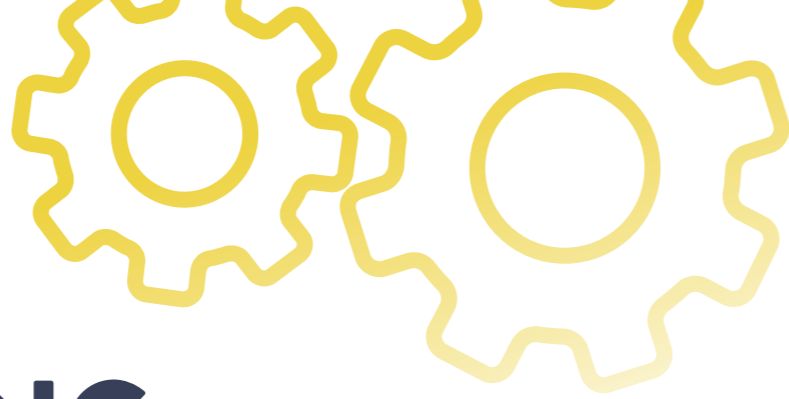
*I don't see myself as able to fix the problems anymore - It's too hard and I'm too tired.*

Other reasons given for not continuing in community management in Australia:

- Sense of powerlessness
- Burnout and fatigue
- Lack of career advancement
- Pandemic inspired career change
- Social media disillusionment

*I doubt it will be online. The platforms, notably Meta (especially Facebook), are rotting. My communities are pleasant but the structures themselves are corrupt vectors for misinformation and hatred.*

*As much as I love and adore the people I work with, this job is taking over my entire life.*



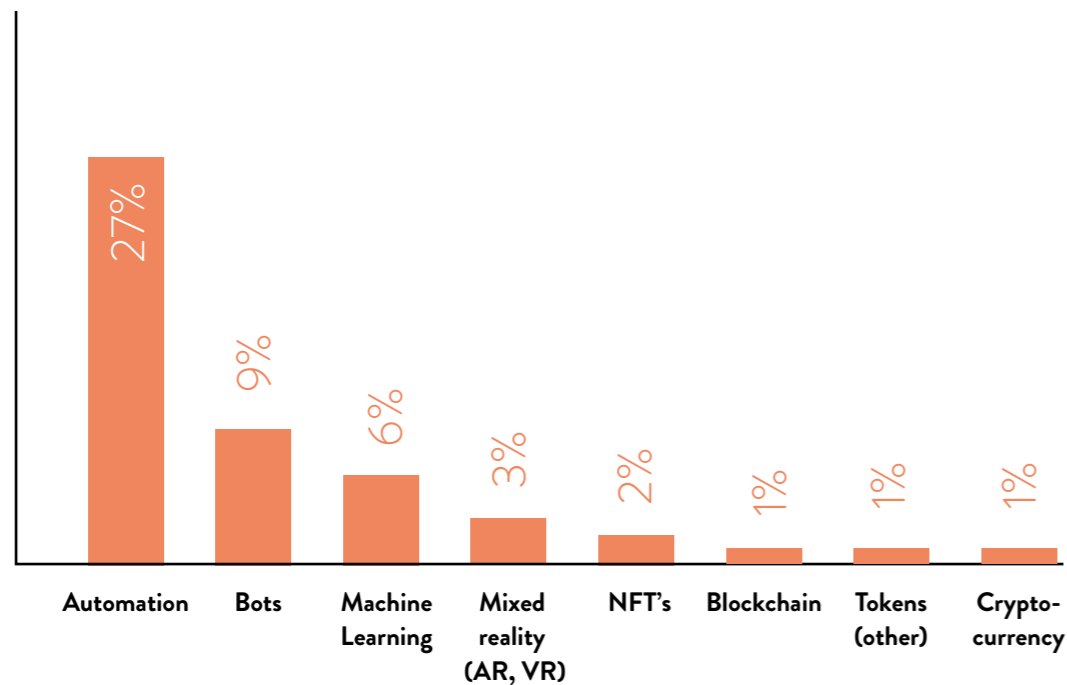
# EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES

## NFT's are in play

Machine assistance (automation, bots and machine learning) in managing online communities in Australia is down year-on-year - from 48% in 2021 to 42% in 2022, but remains common.

Automation has dipped slightly from 30% to 27%, as has usage of bots, falling from 12% in 2021 to 9% in 2022. Machine learning and mixed realities are unchanged year-on-year.

This year, based on global trends in the community space, we included three new additions: NFTs (non-fungible tokens), tokens of any other kind, and cryptocurrency. NFTs have emerged in play with 2%, with tokens and cryptocurrency at 1%.

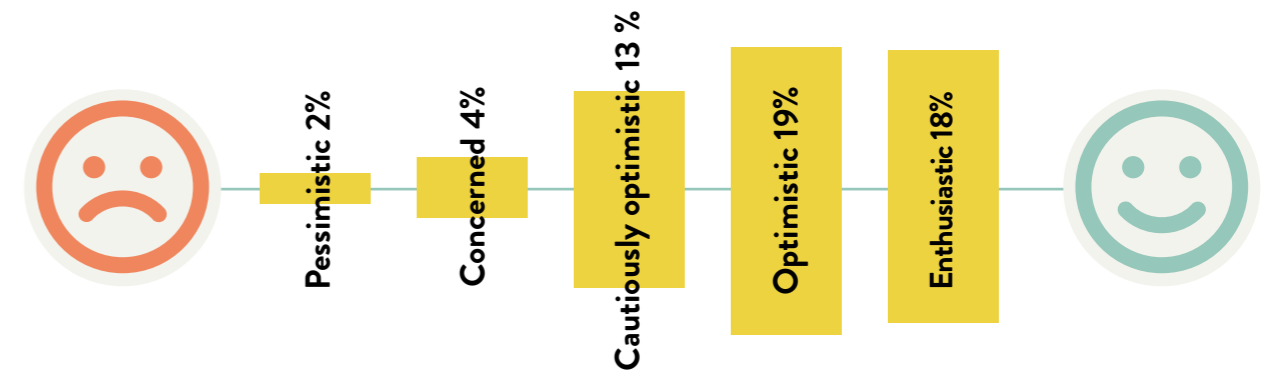


Blockchain remains barely used in Australian online communities, falling from 2% to 1% in 2021, and suggesting a disconnect between market discourse and business or organisational realities.

# FEELINGS ABOUT THE FUTURE

## Optimism in the face of challenges.

How do you feel about the future of community management?



There's been an about face in community manager attitudes about their practice in 12 months.

From 2019 to 2021, enthusiasm about the discipline has fallen progressively - from 21% in 2019 all the way to 8% in 2021.

In 2022, it has bounced back from 8% to 18% - its highest reporting since this survey first launched in 2015.

Cautious optimism is on par with 2021 at 13%, while 4% of respondents are concerned about community management's future.

Pessimism is even lower, rising a fraction from its 0% base in 2021 to 2% in 2022 (its current historical peak is 7%).

## ENTHUSIASTIC

*“It feels like this is an industry that’s just entering its primetime, and I’m excited to have joined when there is still so much opportunity to explore now and in the future. Especially in Australia!”*

*“Community is the way of the future. Collaborative solutions are more and more needed across industries, communities and organisations. Recognising the value of inviting community members to empower themselves creates so many opportunities.”*

## OPTIMISTIC

*“COVID has demonstrated the power of online support.”*

*“The amount of great resources available for community pros is growing rapidly and becoming more formalised (ACM is a big driver of this, along with Commsor, FeverBee and others).”*

*“I still think there’s a lack of knowledge of the practice within organisations. They still see it as purely advertising without seeing all the skills and tools required to make a community successful. Over my career, my biggest barrier especially when working in a marketing agency was obtaining buy-in from stakeholders and showcasing the impact of community. This continues to be a challenge but it’s easing.”*

## CAUTIOUSLY OPTIMISTIC

*“I feel like community management needs a rebrand itself.”*

*“Generally optimistic, but my only concern is I’m seeing a lot of cohort based courses start to appear, led by people with very little experience as Community Managers, or even as cohort-based trainers and facilitators.”*

*“I’m in social impact. It’s a permanent uphill battle against platforms that have commoditised and corrupted communities and connections for profit. My work is good. The platforms are evil.”*

## CONCERNED

*“I feel like we’re headed to the world where the extrinsic motivations pushed by organisations towards community are building more and more toxicity.”*

*“Grassroots community building practices are the most productive and sustainable, yet are not supported by policy, funding, government, or existing systems.”*

*“Community has been around as a practice for generations and the issues don’t seem to be getting much better. The platform landscape and misinformation wars have made it even worse. web3 seemed promising but now seems like it’s a hustle looking to exploit community rather than genuinely focusing on it. Community isn’t going away and the profession has SO much to offer, but systems are resistant.”*

## PESSIMISTIC

*“Communities are getting impossible to reach without spend”*

*“Online behaviour takes a big mental toll, Voller case makes moderating after hours and weekends exhausting.”*

*“I’ve given up. The field isn’t what it was and I don’t like what it’s become.”*

# AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

## Frustration over community management potential.

Each year survey participants are asked what they would most like to change about community management practice, in order to identify areas that need attention and improvement.

Responses fell into four key themes:



## UNDERSTANDING

Once again, the wish of the top of community practitioners’ lists for what they’d like to change about their practice is how it is understood and perceived by managers, colleagues and other industries. They are unhappy that the work is confused with social media advertising (or other digital roles), and that their efforts are not respected or appropriately compensated.

*“I want it to be recognised as a mainstream career just like accountants, lawyers, doctors, advertisers and so on. If people can wrap their heads around what an engineer or product manager (more tech-based roles) does, the concept of a community*

*manager shouldn’t be so far-fetched. Especially since community managers have been around in some capacity since humans first started forming groups.”*

*“I’d like to see businesses uncouple community management from social media. This association causes them to think it’s a junior role that doesn’t have a lot of responsibility and therefore doesn’t require adequate compensation.”*

*“We need greater understanding of the depth and breadth of the profession, with consideration to appropriate resourcing, scope and scale to meet expectations.”*

*"I wish people understood the value of a moderated online community."*

*"The perception that it's a single discipline, where all facets can be done well by the same person. More awareness of the nuances between different types of CM work will help."*

Community managers want to be involved in projects earlier, so they can apply their insights and expertise (head off issues later on).

*"Bring CMs to the table in the planning stage, rather than just IT and Marketing."*

*"We are often an afterthought and end up cleaning up other people's messes."*

*"Community should be integrated into all discussions about member engagement. How can our community contribute to, support or benefit from each org initiative?"*

## ONLINE TOXICITY

Though issues and harms are generally more present on social networking platforms than owned community platforms (due to decreased friction, algorithmic incentivisation and moderation often falling to platforms or under-supported outsourcers), they can emerge anywhere people gather. Poor user behaviour and society wide challenges such as hate speech, racism, misogyny and misinformation frustrate community practitioners on the front lines.

*"I'd like people to have a better appreciation that there are humans behind each keyboard and screen, and to apply the golden rule (treat others the way you want to be treated). The incivility is a grind."*

*"I feel like over the past decade communities are*

*becoming more toxic. I suspect it's because we're now more online and connected than ever, instant gratification is on the rise with quick communication being an expectation nowadays compared to say 10-15 years ago.*

*"The toxicity and capitalism elements in general!"*

*"Facebook specific: make it easier to successfully report and eject fake profiles and trolls. Better brakes on inauthentic activities."*

*"I'd just like to be able to sustain a positive community that has robust discussions without bullying and name calling."*

## WELLBEING

The toll of online harms, budgetary constraints, long or erratic hours, and emotional labour continues to weigh community managers down.

*"I am at rock bottom. Can't do it anymore."*

*"Burnout is too common and not enough organisations take it seriously."*

## SOCIAL MEDIA MONOPOLISATION

A significant number of respondents reported community management getting harder as time goes on, and cited monopolisation of "community" by social media platforms as a factor.

*"I wish we could end the dominance by social media platforms and the new generation who are held hostage by them."*

*"Most issues relate to changes brought on by larger social platforms."*

## OBSTACLES

We asked community managers to share what (if anything) is holding them back the most in their work. Responses fell into four main themes.

- Career development pathways
- Lack of stakeholder understanding
- Pressure to deliver instant results
- Lack of support or respect

*"I've been a community manager for over 7 years and at this stage, I'd like to be in a role where I can start passing on my knowledge to juniors who're coming up as community managers themselves."*

*"Building community takes a long time and everyone wants it ASAP!"*

*"Overall, opportunities for growth and jobs are lacking. I've never been able to climb a traditional ladder like in other occupations and so trying to move across organisations while growing my earnings in line with my experience has been difficult. Fortunately, when I do speak to hiring managers who understand community, they see my value very clearly. Other companies who've never hired for such a role advertise poorly and often don't know exactly what they need."*

*"My organisation has an over-reliance on (and overconfidence in) social media."*

*"Lack of understanding about the value of and unique challenges related to a community not on a social media platform."*

*"Lack of belief in my skills from senior managers (neurodiversity seen as a roadblock instead of an opportunity in career progression)."*



# THE NEXT STEPS



**“The rules  
change so often,  
I don’t have the  
headspace to  
keep up.”**

## We asked online community practitioners to nominate the most valuable next steps for them in the coming 12 months.

Core skill sets - strategy, engagement and moderation - are most sought by survey respondents as they head in 2023. Desire for engagement training has risen the most sharply of these three year-on-year (10% increase).

*“Building communities in 2023 will be expensive and won’t show results right away. I need help to explain why that is.”*

The desire for coaching and mentorship has also seen an increase (from 14% to 17%), as has those wanting more of a voice in policy issues affecting their practice (from 13% to 16%).

Requests for resources and templates have fallen again year-on-year (from 21% in 2020 to 14% in 2021 and 13% in 2022), after concerted efforts from ACM and our global peers in creating these.

*“I would love training in other forms of community such as placemaking and person centred design and values based care.”*

*“I would do anything for a good mentor (and time to work with them).”*



# ABOUT AUSTRALIAN COMMUNITY MANAGERS

**Australian Community Managers is the home for community training, resources and career development.**

Our mission is to grow and enhance community management practice in our region through training, resources, mentoring and meaning-rich connection.

Launched in 2009, ACM was formed by community managers for community managers.

Our members plan, build and manage online communities across industries and contexts. As the leading voice of the online community management industry in Australasia, ACM consults and collaborates with government, researchers and peak bodies around online community management (including moderation and governance, digital engagement and social media platforms).

Since 2011 ACM has hosted the annual conference for online community management professionals, Swarm, and in 2023 it will host the world's first dedicated global online moderation conference, **All Things in Moderation**.

To learn more about our work  
or access training, visit  
[www.australiancommunitymanagers.com.au](http://www.australiancommunitymanagers.com.au)

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