Personify®

No Community Manager? No Problem.

How to kick-start your online community with your existing skills and team

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First things first: why community?

"Engagement" is a buzzword in the association industry. Whether we're talking about engaging your members, engaging your board, engaging your donors — association leaders are always looking for new and/or improved ways to encourage their partners to participate and be a part of their missions.

And it isn't easy. The world has gotten busier, there are lots of missions and causes to support, and people seem more overcommitted and overwhelmed than ever. Then COVID happened.

Since 2020, member engagement has been more difficult to achieve as associations have seen members pause or cease memberships, staff numbers shrink, and revenue and budgets decrease.

And, yet, at a time when associations are confronting some of their biggest association and membership challenges they've seen in years — the need for true connection and meaningful engagement is more important than ever.

The proof is in the pudding.
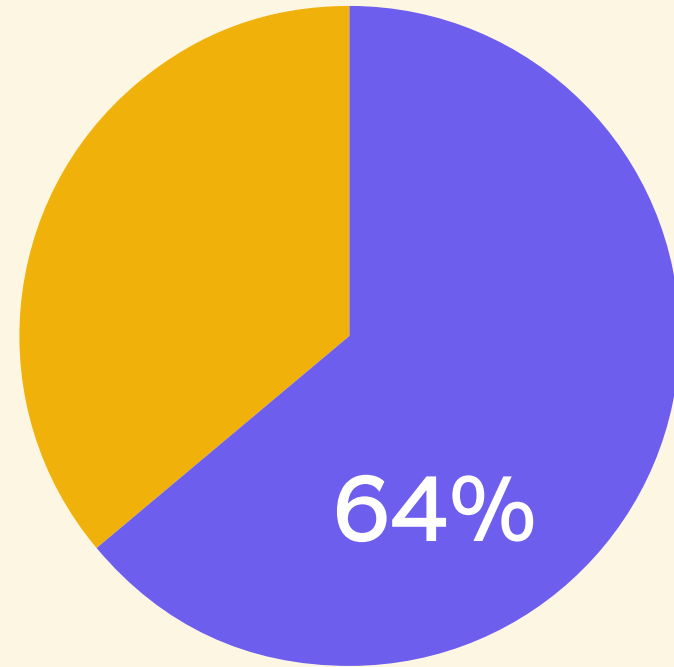

Personify research reveals that 75% of association members identified an online community as a top reason to actively engage in an association.

And it's not only association members who are turning to communities to make long-lasting connections.

64%

64% of online community visitors say they're visiting community sites more often now than they did a couple of months ago.

But we don't have a Community Manager.

Even though it feels like the world has become a bit community-obsessed and association members are either asking for an online community or they're creating ones for themselves, our research also revealed that only 19% of associations plan on using an online community for engagement.

How can the demand seem so high, but the number of association online communities so low? Well, there are a lot of reasons like lack of board support, no budget for it, no great tool to build it — and one of the biggest objections we hear when it comes to an association not having a community — we don't have a Community Manager on staff to run it.

All these objections are important to examine to decide if an online community is the right strategy for your association, but when it comes to a lack of a Community Manager, we have good news: you don't need a dedicated Community Manager to start building and growing a thriving online community.

Sound too good to be true? We get the skepticism, but we've seen it done! In fact, the [National Association of Nutrition Professionals (NANP)](#) surpassed its member sign-up goals in the first four months after they launched a new online community. And all without a Community Manager.

MEET NANP

The National Association of Nutrition Professionals (NANP) was founded in 1985 and has served its members by educating and supporting their community's health and nutrition. Not only has their association evolved to reflect the latest scientific findings, but the NANP team has also been especially responsive to their members' journeys toward holistic nutrition.

NANP creates a member-centric online community

Nicole Hodson, Executive Director of NANP, recognized the need for an online community as she worked in various roles at NANP over the years including credentialing, membership, and then executive leadership.

Her unique perspective on different aspects of the member journey convinced her early on that her members would enjoy using an online community to share each other's experiences and knowledge in nutrition to serve their clients and their communities.

But, as the organization's needs grew and evolved, the online community they had in place no longer met their functional and visual needs, and Nicole was hearing that the sign-on experience was clunky and confusing.

Before she could even begin to approach the board about selecting a new community tool with a lean marketing team, she concluded that an online community would only be worth the investment it was truly built with the NANP members in mind.

"Put yourself in the shoes of your members. Think about their perspective and their perspective only. It's tempting to try and make things easier for us and our teams, but we want to make sure everything we do is for our members."

**NICOLE HODSON,
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, NANP**

4 steps to starting a community without a Community Manager

1 Understand how you'll use your online community for your membership

With the mantra of "put yourself in the shoes of your members" at the heart of Nicole's plan to start building an enhanced online community, she started to observe that some of the most consistent and pressing posts were members asking for nutritional advice for challenging cases. She also noticed a lot of requests for recommendations for things like searching for a personal chef in certain geographical regions.

Once Nicole and her team started noticing these trends it helped them decide which community features, they wanted to highlight on their page and how to promote it for the best engagement.

Understand how you'll use your online community for your association

Even though Nicole was committed to building their community with NANP's members at its heart, Nicole also saw the potential for an online community to help support the board and its staff. Like so many other associations, NANP had a need for seamless document storage and sharing for its board and its members.

Nicole recognized that they could store, share, and exercise version control over the documents that they shared with the board and the members using the Personify community infrastructure. Using their online community this way enabled them to stop using Dropbox and **saved them over $1,600 per year**.

NANP saved $1,600 per year after community platform replaces Dropbox

"Get your board of directors involved if they're industry people, so they can engage with the community."

NICOLE HODSON, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, NANP

2 Look within for the answer to your Community Manager gap

After seeing the value that an improved online community would bring to NANP's membership and the association, Nicole felt like she had the information needed to present to the board for approval. Admittedly, it was a hard sell since there wasn't a line item in the budget for an online community.

But after selecting the right community platform, she went directly to the president and pitched the community again.

It was approved! So now the question became: how will NANP build a community without a Community Manager? Nicole was undaunted by the challenge, and after a quick audit of her team's existing skills, she formed a team that suited their community needs very well.

NANP's community dream team:

Nicole
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR/COMMUNICATION QUEEN.

Oversees overall communication in the community and keeps an eye on activity.

Whitney
MARKETING SPECIALIST/POSTING PRO.

Nicole's right-hand, Whitney manages marketing and member relations. In charge of posting the most relevant information.

Jonathan
VIDEOGRAPHER/WEB WIZARD.

Jonathan specializes in visuals including videos and graphics that have been key in promoting the community and onboarding new members.

This team structure allows the community to be consistently managed for timely and relevant community posting and a seamless experience for members first signing up.

Of course, the team also shares certain responsibilities like finding ways to make the community as cohesive and eye-catching as possible.

We've all heard that 'teamwork makes the dream work,' and for NANP it allowed them to exceed the goals they'd set for their new online community.

END OF YEAR NANP ONLINE COMMUNITY STATS:

556

1,069

+22 over goal

Active Members

Total Members

Sign-on Goal Progress
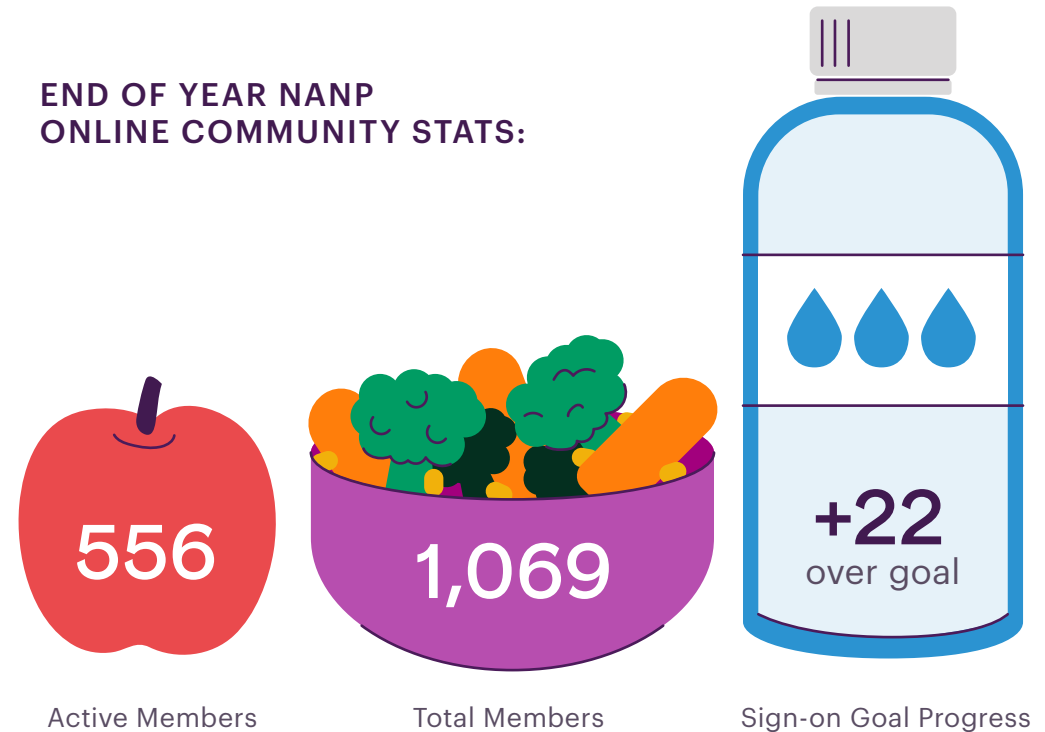
"Our first objective was to get at least half of our members logged into the new community by the end of 2021. Our site went live on September 9th and by December 31st, we had 556 Active Users. We ended 2021 with 1,069 members. So, we exceeded our goal by 22 members signing on to the new community."
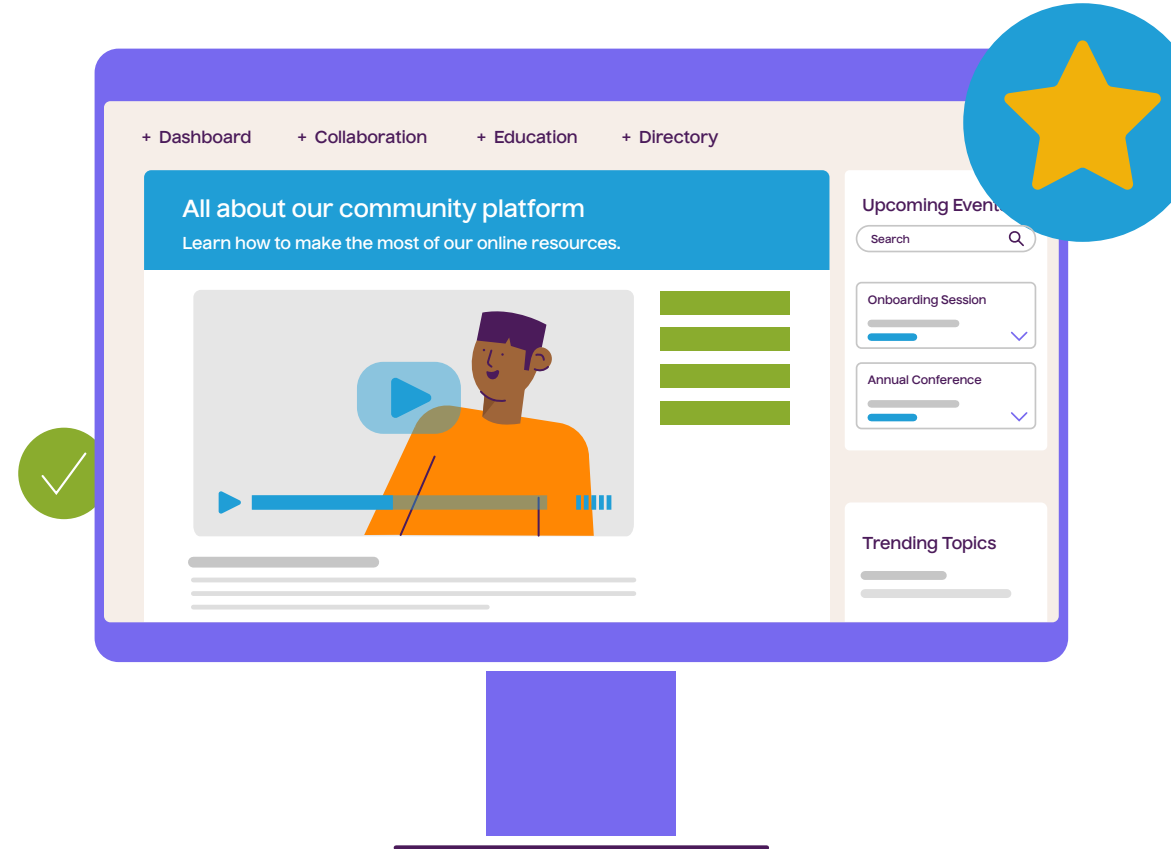
NICOLE HODSON, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, NANP

3 Make promotion and onboarding a (fun) priority.

Many associations that have online communities report that they don't see significant growth until about a year post-launch. And even though NANP exceeded their sign-up goals in the first few months of launching their community, Nicole faced some of the same growing pains other associations experience with a new online community — letting members know that the online community even existed.

> "It took members a while to understand that we had an online space for them, so we did some advertising to let people know that our members can meet with each other in their dedicated space, not on Facebook or anywhere else. **Once they realized that they could meet together with ease, they were all about it.**"
>
> **NICOLE HODSON, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, NANP**

+ Dashboard   + Collaboration   + Education   + Directory

All about our community platform
Learn how to make the most of our online resources.

Upcoming Events

Search

Onboarding Session

Annual Conference

Trending Topics

And when it came to one of the other challenges members report with a new community — knowing HOW to use it — Nicole, Whitney, and Jonathan cooked up a plan that has made onboarding a breeze. They developed a video tour of the new online community to let them know how to make the most of it, and they also reached out to a couple of their most engaged members to capture community testimonials.

[Take a look at NANP's video tour](#) of their online community. ▶

Video generates 1200% more shares than text and image content combined.
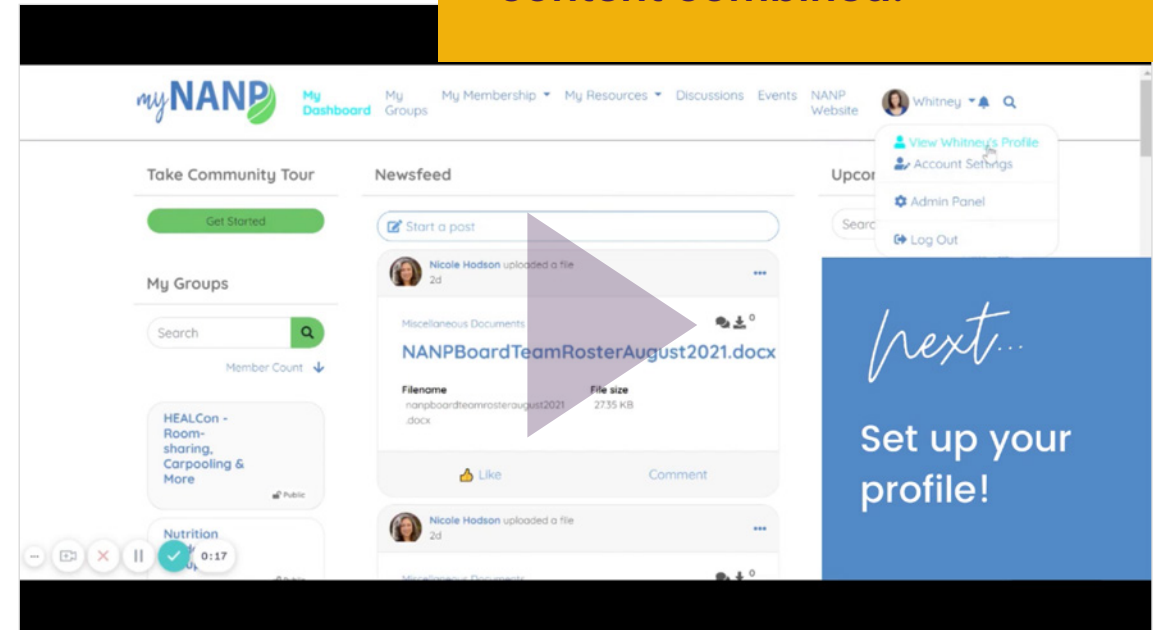
4 Use your online community data for better member engagement.

In addition to setting goals around member sign-ups, Nicole and her team's second objective in implementing an enhanced community was to learn when members are most active, so they can try to schedule new content releases to coincide with those high-activity moments.

For NANP the answer has surprised the team. It turns out that their members are most active on Sundays. Nicole explains how this small data point is already making a difference:

"Traditionally, we've shied away from posting information heading into the weekend, believing that our members would want a break. Now we can see that, in fact, this is when they are searching for new information, making comments, joining groups, etc. **This is incredibly useful information for us, especially while we're in conference season. We can craft our messages and disperse them with a greater chance of being viewed and garnering more engagement**."

NICOLE HODSON, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, NANP

Member Types

Activity by Day

Trending Tags
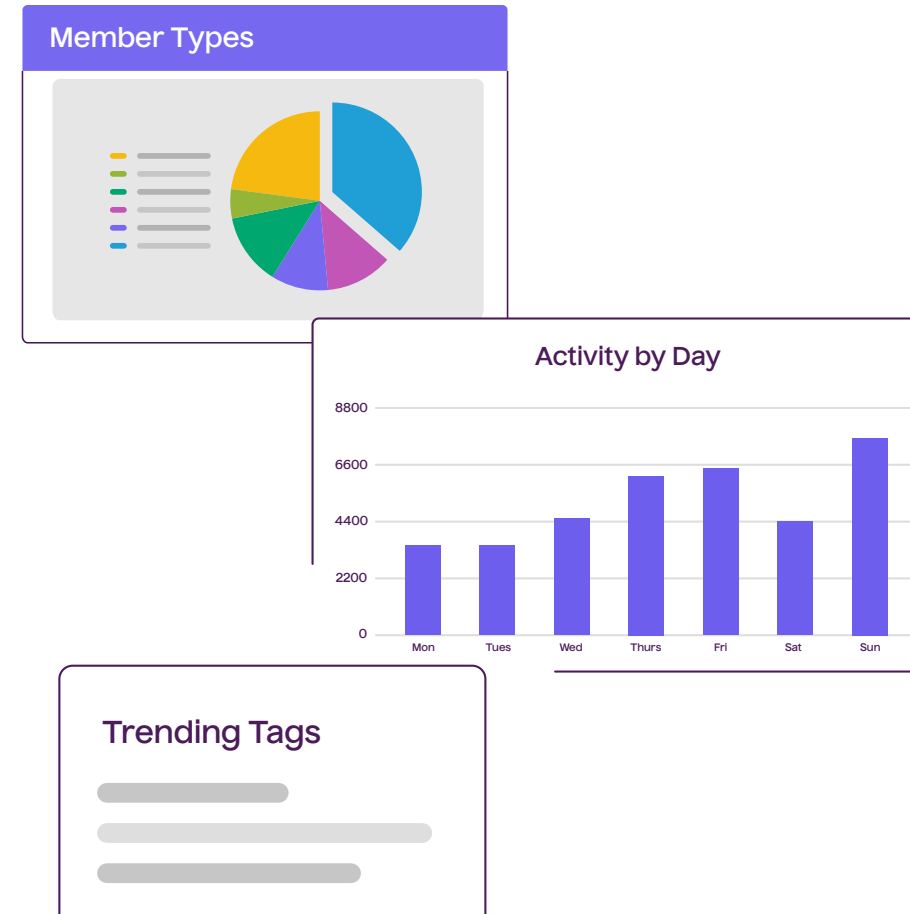
NANP Community Star Moments

**Received over 200 responses** to one of their initial community posts

Easily shared association files to the board using the online community, which saved them **over $1,600 per year** they were spending on Dropbox

Successful SSO led to a seamless experience for members

Exceeded their member sign-up goals in the first four months of launching their new online community

More engagement with learning materials
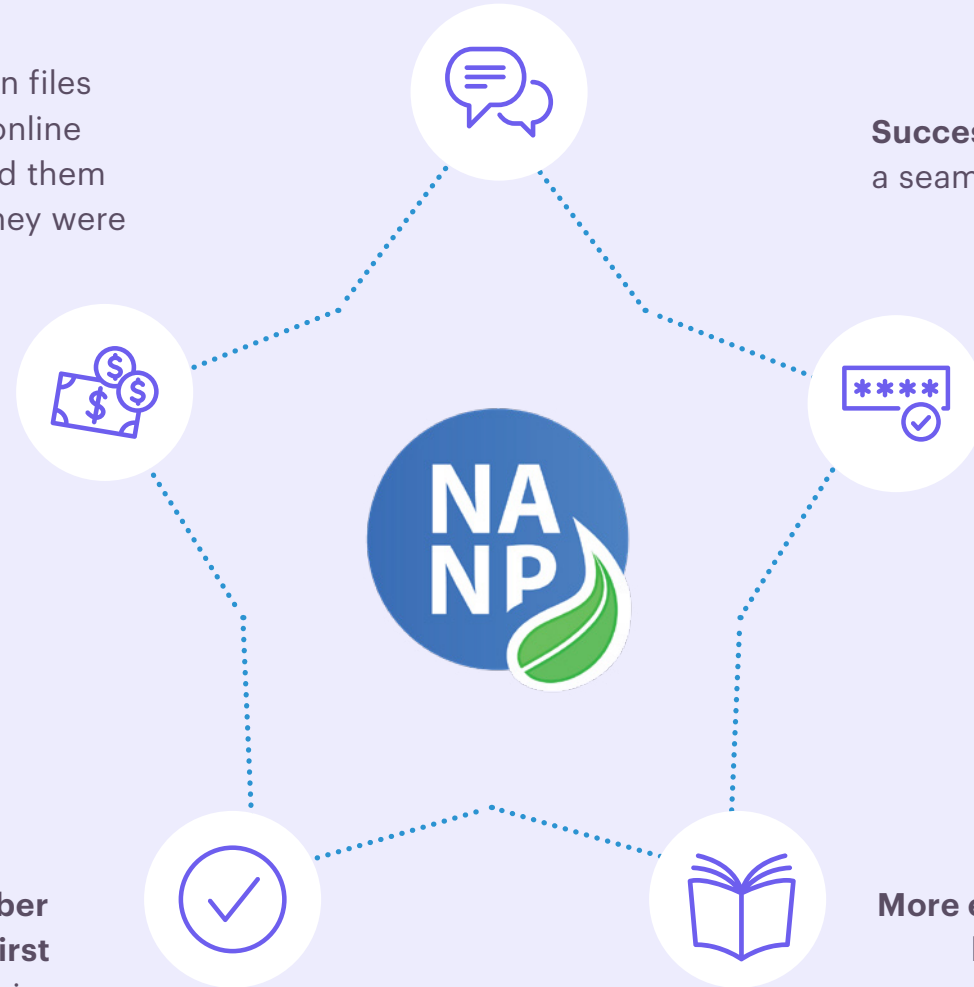
No Community Manager? You can still build something great for your members

A lot of association leaders are talking about online communities right now, and there are a lot of opinions about whether you need to hire a Community Manager to maintain a truly successful community.

We would be remiss if we didn't acknowledge that adding a Community Manager to your team may be needed depending on your association's goals, membership size, and the skills represented on your existing team.

But the NANP story proves that you can launch a successful, active community without a dedicated Community Manager. Every online community is different, and how an association manages it is equally unique.

If you're wondering which approach and technology your association should use to build a community without a community manager? Reach out today.

LET'S TALK COMMUNITY
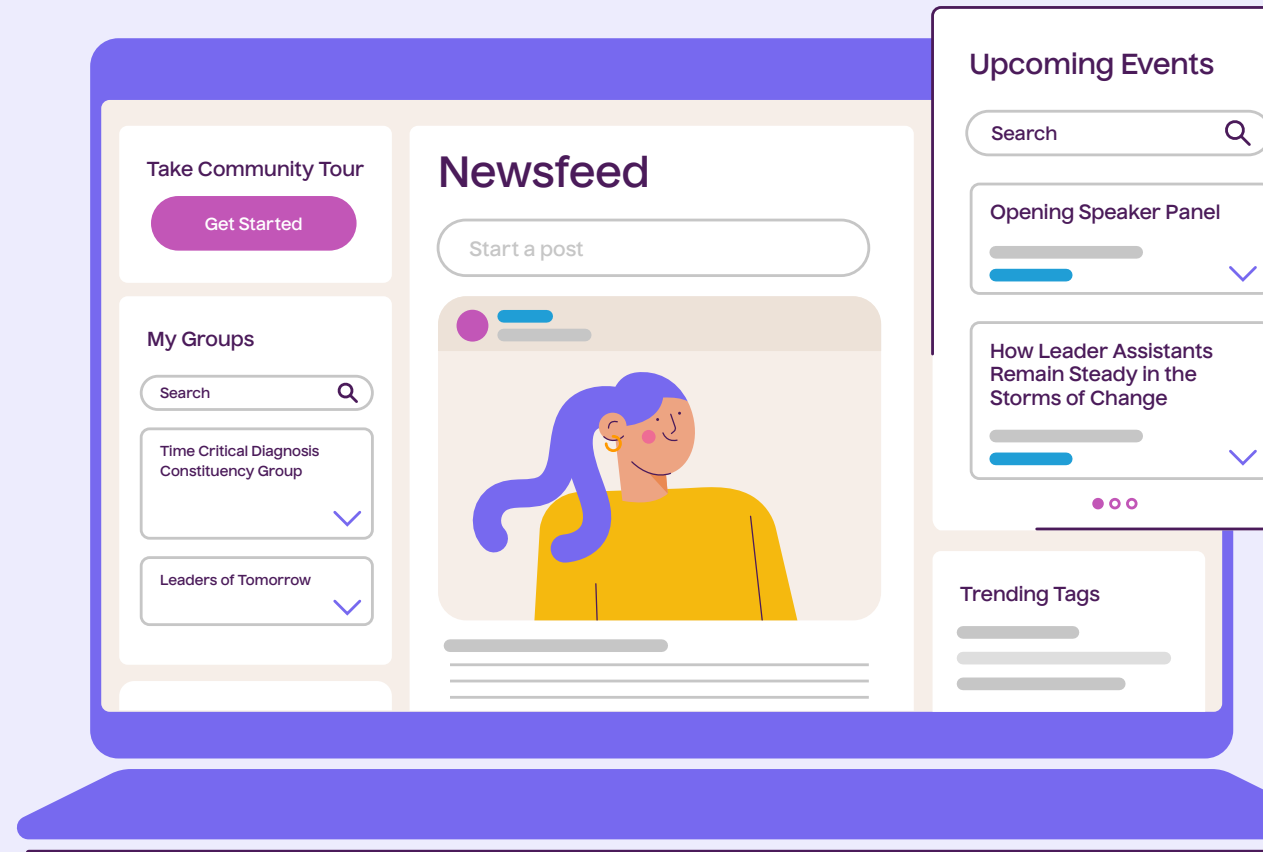
About Personify

Personify helps you manage and grow your community with integrated software solutions that strengthen the connection between your organization, your members, and your mission.

WE'RE IN THE RELATIONSHIP-BUILDING BUSINESS.

Looking for a committed, understanding partner to help you grow?
Let us mix, match, and mold our Community Experience solutions to meet your emerging needs and help you create better relationships with your community. We love to listen, and there's nothing we find more gratifying than deepening the connections that drive your success.

REQUEST A DEMO

We build strong connections with our customers so they can build strong connections with their communities.

70K+ organization staff use Personify solutions every day.

25% of the U.S. population interacts with Personify through associations, events and nonprofits.

20 years of industry leadership make Personify the trusted choice for a technology partner.

Featured in this eBook

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Personify® CommUnity

About CommUnity by Personify:

Personify CommUnity allows your organization to host a dedicated online space for your members, volunteers, event attendees and stakeholders to communicate, learn, plan and grow.

Personify® MemberClicks

Personify® MC Professional

Personify® MC Trade

About MemberClicks by Personify:

Membership management software that helps you grow membership, build an online community and increase non-dues revenue. Our software solutions, MC Professional and MC Trade, are built to help solve the daily challenges of professional associations, trade associations and chambers.

Personify® ThreeSixty

About ThreeSixty by Personify:

Our simple but powerful enterprise association management system comes with all the tools, analytics, and actionable insights you need to accelerate and amplify your mission.

About Personify

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LET'S TALK

CommUnity

About CommUnity by Personify:

Personify CommUnity allows your organization to host a dedicated online space for your members, volunteers, event attendees and stakeholders to communicate, learn, plan and grow.

MemberClicks

About MemberClicks by Personify:

Membership management software that help you grow membership, build an online community and increase non-dues revenue. Our membership software solutions are built to help solve the daily challenges of professional associations, trade associations and chambers.

ThreeSixty

About ThreeSixty by Personify:

Our simple but powerful enterprise association management system comes with all the tools, analytics, and actionable insights you need to accelerate and amplify your mission.

Personify®