

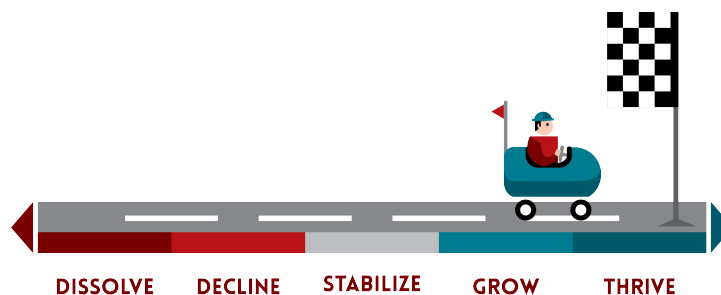
Purpose: Enhance understanding of the leader's role as principal community architect.

Intended Outcome: Gain direction to help your community thrive.

Community Building is about providing people with a platform to be their best selves. The more meaningfully connected we are to our communities, the better versions of ourselves we become. We are more generous, understanding, patient, informed, and trusting. At their core, community leadership programs are centered on Community Building. Central to the discussion of community is the nature of leadership itself, which really only occurs within communities. Community exists when individuals are genuinely concerned about others, have a sense that their fortunes are intertwined, and act in the best interest of one another. Leaders understand the nature of community and see it as their job to create it. Developing skills in the capacity of Community Building enables leaders to be effective as they cultivate, build, and sustain community.

Stages of a Community

Every community goes through stages, even the most stable ones, as shown in the diagram below:



When in a state of *dissolution*, people are no longer willing to belong to the community because it ceases to be relevant or is too toxic. Before dissolving, communities are in *decline*, indicated by less engagement, unclear purpose, and infighting. *Stabilization* is a sign of progress or stagnation, depending on the previous stage. *Growth* occurs when the community progresses and positive change occurs. *Thriving* is a state of high energy and community members experience fulfillment of their needs. For a leader to effectively build community, it is helpful to know why communities grow and decline.

The Growth Cycle

Community growth can be broken down into three stages:

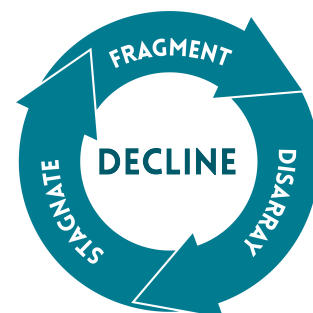
1. Galvanize: Individuals who share a common interest unite by clarifying their Purpose. Leaders make sure everyone is heard.
2. Organize: Leaders provide tools that allow people to act on their shared purpose and create a set of guidelines to encourage focus.
3. Mobilize: Members take action on the stated Purpose. Leaders create ways to measure success and plans for what to do when things go wrong.



The Decline Cycle

Likewise, community decline also can be broken down:

1. Fragment: The connection among members becomes rocky or less frequent and the fabric of the community begins to loosen.
2. Disarray: Fragmenting leads to a state of disarray, where communities may lose members and communication becomes unclear.
3. Stagnate: Finally, the community becomes almost ineffective. The mechanisms that allowed the community to thrive either dissipate or halt.



Community Building Principles

Not every group of people designates a community; some are places of association. A place of association (POA) describes a collective that appears to be a community but the attitudes and behaviors of the individuals within the group are different. The chart below points out some of the differences:

	COMMUNITY	PLACE OF ASSOCIATION
LEADERSHIP	Moments of accountability- anyone has the opportunity to take positive actions that evoke positive reactions from others.	Positions of authority- people wait for prompts from those in authority in order to take action. Until then "it's not my problem."
COMMUNICATION	Open interaction among members. Members build relationships regardless of status.	Interaction is full of politically charged "do's" and "taboos."
COMFORT	Members have a sense of ease around each other and assume that others will be fair and understanding.	Members feel ill at ease around each other and worry about potential threat, misunderstanding and retribution.
SAFETY	Members are concerned for each other's well being and want each other to do well.	People are out for themselves and view another's success as a threat.
AUTHENTICITY	Emphasis placed on people being themselves.	Emphasis placed on projecting the "right" image.
PURPOSE	People manage themselves around a common purpose.	People manage themselves around their individual aims.
ADVOCACY	People feel developed because the organization wants them to grow.	People feel stifled and unsupported. They have to fight to get ahead.
RESILIENCE	When times are tough, people pitch in to help each other.	When times are tough, people save themselves.
DIVERSITY	Value is placed on differences and variety.	Value is placed on likeness and conformity.

Community Building Inhibitors

"Broken Window" Theory: Communities can quickly become run-down when little issues go unaddressed over time. Think of a building with a single broken window. This may serve as an invitation to vandals to further deface the building. Eventually tenants in the surrounding buildings may wish to move away and the community moves into decline.

Over-Reliance on Authority: When the community is dependent on a single person to thrive (CEO, executive director), it may fall into decline if that person leaves. As a leader, focus on creating a culture within the community that will continue to exist after you are gone.