

Note: This transcript is provided for reference only, and is not to be reproduced in any way. This real-time transcript has not been edited, proofread or corrected. It is a draft transcript and is not certified to be true and correct.

TRANSCRIPT – Community Conversations Episode #101

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

community, double amc, people, wmc, feel, calls, volunteers, engagement, great, members, work, talk, champions, love, academic medicine, community roundtable, share, program, opportunity, peers

SPEAKERS

Penny Schnarrs, Jim Storer, Shannon Abram

Jim Storer 00:06

Hello, and welcome to another edition of community conversations. My name is Jim store and I am one of the founders of the Community Roundtable. And I am joined today by my capable co host, Shannon Abram Shannon.

Shannon Abram 00:18

Hi, Jim, we are excited to be back with a brand new edition for you. We have a longtime friend of the Community Roundtable and first time podcast guests for us, which is very excited. The always delightful Penny shares. Hi, Penny. Hello,

Penny Schnarrs 00:33

good morning. Nice to be here.

Shannon Abram 00:35

We are so excited. You're here with us. For anyone out in our audience who hasn't talked to you or met you. I would love if you could introduce yourself. Who are you? Where do you work? What kind of community do you work with? Certainly,

Penny Schnarrs 00:48

I work for the Association of American Medical Colleges or as we say double A MC. We are an organization of acronyms like most. And we have been very fortunate to be working with the community roundtable very closely to help stand up our virtual communities. And I feel very lucky, I came back to the double AMC about two and a half years ago, and the communities launched in 2019. And when I got back to the double AMC, we had about 900 folks who were in various stages of you know, pilot being voluntold, they needed to work on community and stand something up. And now fast forward, we've got almost 50 sub communities for our members across the US and Canada and across the world really now. So anyone who has an affinity or a connection and a passion to help really improve and change academic medicine. And so now we've got almost 6000 or so registered users in the

community. And we've got about 35 of my peers across the WMC that I work with who manage those sub communities. And it's been a delight in coming back to the WMC. It's been incredible, really being a part of seeing the shift in working in a new way. And helping folks here internally think about ways of working in virtual community and this this way of engaging from an association perspective, and being able to work so closely with you all at the Community Round Table to really help us do it. Right.

Jim Storer 02:46

Well, I can speak personally, it's been a lot of fun working with you and the team of the double AMC over the years. And I was thinking about this. I don't, I'm surprised. I don't know this part of your backstory. But how did you kind of get into community? Like, why was that the path that that you ended up on?

Penny Schnarrs 03:03

I have spent most of my career in the nonprofit like literal health related, like nonprofit fundraising, or in higher education, alumni relations, donor relations, fundraising. And so everything that I have done up to this point had really been about community building and relationship building and in its purest form, right. And really working with volunteers really working in communities, and really understanding the importance and the significance of helping people feel very comfortable and safe, very quickly, feeling authentic, especially when you're working with students, or alumni or patients and their families and going on that journey to represent those people and their stories. And most recently, before I came back to the double AMC, I was working in internal communications and in a payer, provider, large insurance and health care network here in Pittsburgh. And so healthcare has always kind of been something that's really important to me, and such a big, wicked problem. And COVID hit, and it hit very close to home for me. And I had always kept an eye out on the WMC because I worked there almost a decade ago. My wife is a physician, I grew up in the medical community. My mom was the head of a department and a local medical center. And before HIPAA was a thing, it was a kid that would go to work with her and help her or work. And so, you know, it's always been something really important and rewarding to me. And so when I saw this position, post about a community manager, it's something that I was doing and we internal work at Highmark Health previously. A and understanding how important it is to bring people together. Especially when COVID was at its height and feeling this sort of disconnect and feeling this loneliness, and just everyone feeling just this this new way, right and really talking about this in a new way. And I loved that work that I did. But it was only one very small piece of a lot of other things that I was doing. So when I saw this role, it was like the stars aligned. And here I am. And it's been really incredible, even on my worst day, working in community, it's still a really, really good day, because I am a person who really loves to see the impact of the work that we do and my why my purpose is really about connecting people. And it took me a long time to understand what my purpose was. And now that I do, it really lights me up to see those those small, but really impactful and intentional pieces coming together.

Jim Storer 06:05

I'm thrilled you found your why because you're really good at it. And it's good that you're there and the WMC is lucky to have you in that position. It's really fascinating to think about the association, business model and communities. Online Community is such a natural extension of the membership model. It's

surprising when you come across an association that's not really embraced and then doubled down on community as an important component of what they do. Yeah,

Penny Schnarrs 06:33

it's really interesting, right? Jim? I think we see this a lot. And I saw this in a previous work, I think we often see it and we, you and I talk about this as Oh, it's a nice to have not something that is a priority. And I've said this a lot I so believe in the engagement cycle, and how powerful engagement is and how the platform itself is just one component right of engagement. But I often hear myself saying to people, you keep saying that word engagement, I don't think it means what you think it means, right? We get really stuck. I think not just at the double AMC, I think in a lot of roles. As someone who has worn an engagement hat, and a lot of different places, we feel ownership over certain groups of constituents and doing things a certain way. And I think the association world in particular, there isn't as much need to feel innovative or necessity to be innovative. And people find their ways through which they've really worked through those in person meetings in the past. And that's great. But what about all that in between time to really connect with people, and in this new kind of world, right? I talk about it a lot. I always talk about my wife as my litmus test here, who still is not part of the virtual communities here at the double AMC. And I always say once I get the right statement in place that convinces her I know, I know, I've hit the lottery, I know we've won. But people who just it will always just be a nice to have rather than taking the time and the intention of understanding what powerful connections can really come from taking this opportunity. And this type of engagement further,

Shannon Abram 08:32

I love that you have an at home beta tester, you're very, very lucky. It sounds like you have a really thoughtful approach to engagement. And so I'm wondering, how do you and how does the double AMC think about programming for engagement.

Penny Schnarrs 08:48

I feel again, really lucky because coming into this role, being at the WMC, I am trusted in my role to be the subject matter expert. And then I get to also learn from the best leaning on Jim, and all of you at the Community Roundtable. And all the folks who do this, and have been doing this in various ways, right, and all my peers in this world, but I feel really lucky because I ask, I asked our community members, I don't just assume and I think because of all of these years of working in, in fundraising and Alumni Relations and working so closely with volunteers, I really think about the end user a lot that is that is my frame of reference. And so I never want to assume, as I always want to have that connection, and asking them and and really empowering them, educating them and having their voice to resonate. And so we asked the last few years, I've reached out to our most engaged members and we've asked them, What do you want what's working in the community for you? Why are you engaged, what doesn't work? And this past year, that results were Are they surprisingly seemed to, to like how it works and and for the most part, the comments we get are, this is really great, I need to find time to do more here and then around programmings surprisingly or not our members are it's such a breath of people even though the the subject matter that connects us all right around academic medicine, but we've got people who are frontline clinicians, we've got faculty, we've got staff that support them everywhere from fundraisers to IT professionals to those who are developing the curriculum, right. So we've got a really broad spectrum of people in the community. And then the actual students and trainees like residents as

well. And then just actual members of the community, right of the larger like, physical community, people who are teachers, K through 12 teachers, or a career counselors and advisors who are prepping students for pre med, those types of things. So trying to think about programming that is either very, very broad, or very, very specific between our sub communities and our larger open forum. And that's how our communities are set up, we have an open forum that all members of the community are invited into. And we kind of liken that to our hotel lobby, right, you get the opportunity to really get a broad scope of what goes on at the double AMC. A lot of people like anything, you come and get what you need, and you leave, and you don't really know, all of the different things that you can really get or be involved with, right? This is the organization that provides the MCAT. And this is how you get matched to your fellowship. But then also there are all these rate learning programs and professional development programs and support throughout a members journey. And so when asking them about the they, they verbalize that, yes, they want professional opportunities, but they also just want to social opportunities to get to know each other. And we work really hard in our community Lab, which is I mentioned, we've got about 35 folks that we work with here at the WMC that run those sub communities. They're very specific. And those folks work really hard to work at that very specific level. And we've got topic base communities, we've got closed communities that are maybe cohorts of people going through trainings, or people that are serving on a workgroup. And that's where they kind of do their work or their setup. This is where they come for exchanging their documents. And it's really like a library repository. So we have a lot of different case studies. And so our folks have been really great in coming together, we have a monthly what we call our community lab, we have calls where we talk about what's working, and what isn't with our managers, and we have a team's channel that we've set up, where, you know, we try to work asynchronously. And we've worked again, with the help of Jim and team of this creating the center of excellence of this entire SharePoint library of really, we don't want anyone to feel like they, they are on an island as a community manager running these sub communities. And we want them to copy and steal and share these documents. And these opportunities of you know, here are these templates and everything from the onboarding to the sample programs to editorial calendars. And so they're really great at various levels of doing that type of programming. But the programming that we then concentrated on this past year, based on the feedback was really trying to do something that was just really broad and general. And so we started what we've called the NADA Book Club series. Two years ago, we tried to book club, and we found that people were very scared, it was kind of off putting, because if you didn't have the time to read the book, right? That's daunting, and no one has time to commit to long term things anymore, like I think one and done are really easy things. And so we had a much smaller turnout, that first round of book club specific calls. And this year, we've made them much broader and we're making them topic based. And so we're halfway through this series this time around. I was blown away by the interest. This topic this year was its poverty and its effects in academic medicine. really broad, but it came out of just like two years ago, our big annual meeting in the fall and we had one of our plenary sessions and there was a book I'll tell anyone that one of our speakers wrote a book about right poverty and who was actually entitled poverty in America. And people really gravitated towards this plenary session, it was one of our largest attended. And we had some great chatter about it in the virtual community during the meeting itself. And so we planned for sessions. And we have a fantastic group of community champions who are members of the community, they are peers, right, and their faculty, their staff, they model the behavior in the community, they welcome new members, we have five monthly meetings every other month, where they come and we talk about what's working in their specific communities, I share with them any

new features that are happening in the system, we talk about, just in general things that are happening. And so we have them facilitating the talks. And it's been fantastic seeing these champions really step up and have this peer to peer connection, and really just have this space to discuss a really broad topic, and, and have people show up and feel safe enough to have this dialogue and connect with one another who would have never met otherwise, who are, you know, exchanging information and the chat as we're talking, and we're building out collecting resources around this topic and creating a resource bundle that we're going to share across the community around what they're doing in their own institutions. Who is interested in this topic that wants to get together, you know, maybe there's opportunity for us, in community, right, this is what I love about it like, these are big, wicked problems. And community platforms allow us to level the playing field like this is a place where you can get the right voices at the table to really talk about these complex problems. And maybe there's a real opportunity here to maybe make a dent in an issue like poverty, or food insecurity, or these issues that are affecting academic medicine. And it's been really fantastic to see the response and the interest and just the members reaching out and thanking us for saying, these are real issues that affect us every day. And this is something we want to talk about, and we want to connect on. It's been fantastic. And I'm really excited. And you know, I'll never not fill my cup by seeing volunteers be passionate and driven and involved and empowered. And

Jim Storer 17:50

it's definitely heartening seeing the community come together at the double AMC. And there's something you said about your center of excellence that I just wanted to go back to and talk a little bit more about it was probably over 10 years ago, that we started to see at the community roundtable that there was this role within community managers, you know, job that wasn't formally part of what they were doing. But it was something that they were spending a lot of time on, and that was evangelizing community within their organizations. And I know with your center of excellence, you talked about it. But that's that's a big part of what you're doing is making sure that the folks that are on the front lines of community at the double AMC have the tools to share kind of what's what's working within the community and are giving templates to their peers so that they can have the same sort of success that one person is having within their community in multiple communities. So that's just been fascinating to see. And then I loved how you talked about the virtual book club. I'm sure there are people because I'm a little bit closer to it. But there I'm sure there are folks that are like, can you talk more about the mechanics of that because it's I think it's a really great program that you've created. And let's do a little mini case study here. So people understand how they can set it up for themselves.

Penny Schnarrs 19:06

Sure, again, we picked something that was broad enough topic that we saw already had some interest, right. And we set up some zoom links. And then we used our beloved chat chi btw to help us create some exciting texts to help market these calls. And also we did it as a series and we told people they could sign up for one or multiple calls. They did not have to be members of the virtual community to join the calls, but why wouldn't they? Right, so it's a great plug to come back to the community. We created some quick blurbs that we shared with all of our community champions, and we asked them to share those blurbs with their own networks. And we shared it obviously on our own social media channels here at the double AMC. We shared it in our command any lab with our community managers so that they could share broadly as well. We've actually had some people here at the WMC that hopped on the

calls as well who were intrigued and interested across the organization, we do not record them, because we want it to feel safe for people. And I'm happy to after this is all done, I'm happy to share all the materials that we did have in the network. So people can see the mentioned this resource bundle, we've been encouraging people to share items, and we have in our community, we've been creating resource bundles. As I mentioned, the double AMC is really large and vast and what we do and we know our website can be overwhelming to the people. And so we've been asking members of the community, what topics are important to them, and curating these bundles, topic based bundles with their help, not just WMC resources, but resources of items that they know about that they think would be beneficial. And so we're doing that and collecting these items in each of the communities. So I asked the champions if they would be willing to facilitate these conversations. And we have two champions. In each call, I created a list of leading questions, again, with the help of chat GPT, a very loose agenda for each of them. I'm on each of those calls to support the champions, they do a great job of talking about the importance of community and sort of why we do these calls and how to keep the conversations going, we have an email that goes out after with a survey and a direct link to a discussion post about this topic, and to the resource bundles. And I had a meet up call with the champions to kind of talk through what the flow would be like. And so it took some extra effort, obviously working with volunteers to make them feel comfortable. And they were at various levels of comfort somewhere like yeah, this is just a call, we will witness this is going to be great. And some of them are like I need to know what will happen from 10 to 10 of three and then at 1003, we will start doing X and they've all done so far, great job. And it's been pretty simple. So far, we've done some blurbs out into our larger constituents email newsletters as well to market this. And then obviously, we our platform is higher logic. And so we have advertised the events in the hydrologic platform and sent a reminder about the events as well. And anyone who didn't come to the event who registered, they get an email that says we're sorry, you didn't even make it. But there are still others you can sign up for. And we've seen the registrations coming in as those emails have been sent. So it's been really positive to see. And the first conversation we had actually tapped out and 100 writers registrants, we kept it. And so it's been great. And people are eager to keep the conversation going, which is fantastic, both in our community, but also knowing full well that it is a platform, I am meeting people where they are. So people are very quick on LinkedIn to now be reaching out to me and wanting to connect on this topic and emailing me follow up. And um, you know, guiding them back to the virtual community, and doing some of that extra back end work to keep bringing people back together. This

Shannon Abram 23:22

truly sounds like a community manager's Dream Program. I mean, we've sort of come full circle on engagement, but it sounds so organic. You mentioned that you're having sort of internal champions work on these programs. And do you have a formal process for identifying those people and managing those people? Or is it sort of a self selecting group?

Penny Schnarrs 23:44

So the champions program is self selecting Weaver. So in Higher Logic, there is a volunteer module. And so you can sign up to become a champion. Also, about two years ago, we sent an email around to our highest engaged members, and we were like, Hey, you're already modeling the behavior? How about get recognized for it and learn a little bit more along the way. And it was incredible. I think of the 50 people, I sent that email to 40 responded to it, it was exceptional. And you know, like anything else,

any type of volunteer program, you get various levels of involvement, but as someone who works with volunteers, I will take any level of involvement, right when and people kind of do what I think their comfort level is or when their schedule allows, right. And so some of them I see every meeting and I see them welcoming every single group in the community on our welcome Wednesday, like welcoming all the new members. And some I see you know, in the summer because that's when they're least busy in an academic institution. Perfect. And it's been it's been great really getting to meet these people and just the cross pollination there, right? Because again, I've got physicians interacting with fundraising staff and curriculum, and IT staff and residents. And so again, it's just this beautiful blend of people who would not interact. Otherwise who come together on a call every other month and now recognize each other, know each other and respond to each other in our champions community, because we have our own virtual community space as well.

Jim Storer 25:29

All right. Are you ready for a speed round? Penny?

Penny Schnarrs 25:33

Oh, yeah.

Jim Storer 25:35

All right. We like to do this at the tail end of the podcast, and I think I might already know the answer to this. I know I know the answer to this. But are you Team dog or Team Cat? Dog team dog? Yeah,

Penny Schnarrs 25:48

but my dog is. She acts like a cat.

Shannon Abram 25:52

What are you binging right now?

Penny Schnarrs 25:54

I am binging Oh, God so much. I am binging I'm just gonna throw it out. Because I love it so much. Our five means now everybody watch it. It's amazing. So that

Shannon Abram 26:03

is one thing I did watch. There's very little t shirt watch. And I've seen that and I love

Penny Schnarrs 26:07

it. It's great. We're still recording out for season three. All right,

Jim Storer 26:11

something you mentioned COVID. Earlier in the podcast, something that we all got accustomed to, during COVID was working from home and I'm wondering if you've got a favorite work from home hack. Oh, I

Penny Schnarrs 26:23

just think like I consider myself a huge extrovert and I had never worked from home full time. I love it. I didn't think I would and I love it. And I think it's because mainly I hate shoes. And I love walking. I love being in my bare feet. Like I love being in my pajamas and my bare feet. I think better I am more. Just I love it.

Shannon Abram 26:45

I'm with you. I'm teen Birkenstock all the time, and it's much more acceptable to be that way in my own home than it is out in the work world.

Penny Schnarrs 26:51

Right? It just is. Comfort all the way. What is your favorite dessert ice cream? Like there's always room for ice cream like it it feels the craps with the heart. Even better if there's peanut butter something on or in it? Yeah.

Jim Storer 27:05

Oh, wow. Okay, we had this on a podcast recently. And I mentioned that I found a ice cream shop in rural New Hampshire, that founder was on it. I think she was a semifinalist for the James Beard Awards. It's called super secret ice cream. It's in Bethlehem, New Hampshire. And it's amazing. I

Penny Schnarrs 27:25

want to go to there. Yes.

Jim Storer 27:28

What is your community superpower?

Penny Schnarrs 27:31

I think it really is the relationship building and building trust. rather quickly. Like I will bring all the authenticity and we will make you comfortable whether you like it or not.

Shannon Abram 27:41

I really love that heavy handed approach to authenticity. Like you're just your sunshine. And that's just the way it is who will or what is your community inspiration.

Penny Schnarrs 27:51

I think that it's it's actually my mom and my grandmother, they are community builders that was happened. My mom's one of seven. So she pretty much was in charge of a small community, very young age. And they always brought people together. Like I'm an only child, and I never felt like it. There were always people and laughter. And I thought that it was normal that you were always volunteering, that you were always bringing people adopting people and families into your home that you were always doing for the community in general and that you were just always bringing, like connecting people. I just, I thought that's how the world works. And honestly, wouldn't it be beautiful if if that really was how everyone saw it.

Jim Storer 28:40

I love that. And you know, I think it may have been the first time someone said their mom. So love that. Yeah,

Penny Schnarrs 28:45

she'll probably she's gonna hear this and then she'll cry. You're welcome. Oh,

Shannon Abram 28:50

that made it all worth it. Oh, Penny, this has been it's always delightful to talk to you. But this was a wonderful conversation. And thanks so much. Thanks for your time today.

Penny Schnarrs 29:02

Thank you as always, you are a delight. And thanks for teaching me all the things.

Shannon Abram 29:07

Thanks for listening to another episode of community conversations with the Community Roundtable.