Introduction

Volumes 1 and 2 in this series address how to find your place in intentional community by either creating or joining one. But how can this experience—and communities themselves—last past the “honeymoon” phase? How can groups turn long-term ideals into reality within their lives together?

A combination of “soft” and “hard” skills and systems must be present for intentional communities and their members to endure, evolve, and thrive. Sustainability in both human and ecological relationships is key to developing a cooperative culture that lasts—and is the focus of *Wisdom of Communities* Volumes 3 and 4.

The stories in this third volume focus on the “soft” skills and approaches—the human dimension of community living. Authors share experiences, tools, advice, and perspectives that will benefit anyone who wants to help their community function well and support members’ well-being.

Articles explore the nuts and bolts of living together in community: creating and sustaining a cooperative group culture; decision-making and governance (including extensive reflections on consensus as well as Diana Leafe Christian’s complete series on sociocracy); power, gender, class, and race; relationships and intimacy; politics and neighbor relations. These are all essential areas that communities need to address if they are to retain members and develop strong and healthy group connection.

Communitarians often discover that the quality of life they experience has much more to do with the quality of their interactions with each other than with physical amenities. Systems, structures, agreements, understandings, awareness, cultural practices, and self-education can all contribute to increasing that quality of life. Learning about these “soft skills” from others engaged in similar work can help communities immeasurably.

All articles are drawn from the past decade of *Communities* magazine. Every issue of *Communities* contains further treatments of these and similar themes, so we hope that you’ll not only learn from these past stories, but also keep up with new ones by subscribing to the magazine (ic.org/subscribe).

Thanks for making use of these resources, and good luck on your community journey!

Chris Roth
Editor, *Communities*
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Ecological relationships are relatively easy to deal with. Human relationships are often much more difficult, but we can design social structures that favor beneficial patterns of behavior.

Permaculture’s 12 principles apply to human groups just as much as to any other ecological system.

A clearly articulated evolutionary purpose, a welcoming of the whole self, and governance through self-management are keys to collective success.

II. DECISION-MAKING AND GOVERNANCE

Our newest FIC blogger offers four aids to efficient and energizing group proposal generation—replacing battling, coercion, and rigidity with curiosity, flexibility, and bridge-building.

What makes the “best” community meetings turn out so well?

How can groups simultaneously welcoming of and skittish about outside participation in meetings balance competing needs and concerns?

The creators and owners of Port Townsend EcoVillage wrestle with power imbalances as they temporarily suspend consensus process in order to move their cooperative group project forward.

Balancing the urge to express ourselves with respect for the history and time investments of a group can help consensus be fun and effective, rather than dreadful and debilitating.

A cohousing community employs a Consensus Process for Complex Topics to tackle a perennially difficult area and create an effective Community Contribution System.

Straw polls can keep alive a competitive dynamic that undercuts the attempt to build and maintain a collaborative culture.

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Tactics like outmaneuvering people with supermajorities rather than striving for consensus don’t move us in the cultural direction we urgently need in this polarized world.

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Communities 156, 80  Chris Roth
This new card deck—“a pattern language for bringing life to meetings and other gatherings”—marks a milestone in group-process resources.
Thinking Flexibly About Consensus. A collaborative, cooperative, agreement-building discussion can happen without requiring unanimity as the decision rule.

How the “N Street Consensus Method” Helps N Street Cohousing Thrive. A deterrent to frivolous, personal blocking, N Street’s method balances power with responsibility.

Consensus and the Burden of Added Process: Are There Easier Ways to Make Decisions?: Busting the Myth That Consensus-with-Unanimity Is Good for Communities, Part III. People don’t all move to community for the same reasons; emotional processing which is nourishing for some is onerous to others.

With Arms Spread Wide with Love. Patience, humor, and inner work are required to build community from the ground up; and sometimes “consensing on the right side of the brain” is exactly what’s needed.

Saying Goodbye to Consensus-with-Unanimity in European Communities: Busting the Myth that Consensus-with-Unanimity Is Good for Communities, Part IV. Several European groups have modified consensus for more harmony, trust, and connection; others have changed to newer governance and decision-making models.


Self-Governance with Circles and Double Links: How Sociocracy Can Help Communities, Part II. Making decisions in many interconnected smaller circles can be more effective and efficient than making decisions in one big, whole-community circle.


Radical Governance Changes in Two North American Ecovillages. Earthaven and Dancing Rabbit take leaps forward in their decision-making and governance systems.

Why No Tyranny of the Minority in Sociocracy: How Sociocracy Can Help Communities, Part IV. Sociocracy includes built-in remedies for dealing with debilitating blocking, including asking someone to leave the circle.
The Top 10 Most Common Mistakes in Consensus Process and What to Do Instead

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It’s possible to do consensus—like any other process—poorly, but addressing common pitfalls can help it be a boon rather than a bane to your group.

Misconceptions about Sociocracy

Communities 167, 80, 79

Diana Leafe Christian

The supposed shortcomings of Sociocracy are mostly based on misunderstandings of the system.

Sociocracy, Feelings, and Emotions

Communities 169, 63–65

Jock Millenson

Kalikalos members make community decisions with the help of Sociocracy, and work through feelings and emotions using other tools, ideally at a separate time and place.

The Six Steps of Proposal-Forming in Sociocracy

Communities 169, 66–67

Diana Leafe Christian

Sociocracy’s proposal-forming methods can be used independently and can benefit any community, whatever its decision-making methods.

Selecting People for Roles (Sociocracy Elections):

How Sociocracy Can Help Communities, Part VII

Communities 170, 60–64

Diana Leafe Christian

Sociocracy’s steps for filling roles have distinct advantages over both volunteering (self-nomination) and majority-vote elections.

The Seven Steps of Sociocracy—Putting it All Together

Communities 172, 63–66

Diana Leafe Christian

Sociocracy’s separate parts work best when used in concert.

Facilitating Diverse Groups

Communities 173, 20–23

Starhawk

Social edges may become places of intense conflict and pain. Skilled facilitation can help assure that diversity brings growth, resilience, learning, and enrichment to our groups.

Saying “No” to Prospective Members

Communities 173, 44–45

Laird Schaub

The ability to say “no” to people who want to join your community but who are not a good fit can be one measure of your group’s maturity.

Avoiding “Sociocracy Wars”:

How Communities Learn Sociocracy and Use It Effectively...Or Not

Communities 173, 58–61

Diana Leafe Christian

There are three requirements for using Sociocracy in order to truly benefit of it—and not meeting these conditions can be a recipe for failure.

III. POWER, GENDER, CLASS, AND RACE

The Bully Question

Communities 145, 10–14

Tree Bressen, Laird Schaub, Beatrice Briggs

How can a community deal with a member who frequently gets their own way by domination, belittling, and noncooperation?

Balancing Powers: Leadership and Followship in Community

Communities 148, 30–33

Elizabeth Barrette

In a healthy community, leadership and followship are equally important roles, each with vital skill sets that can assure effective teamwork.
More Perspectives on Leadership and Followship: A Response to Elizabeth Barrette

Communities 148, 34–35, 75
Ma’ikwe Schaub Ludwig
The author identifies additional leadership skills, cautions against blind followship, and reflects on the many types of power in cooperative groups.

Power and Powerlessness in Community

Communities 148, 36–37
Markus Euler
A community member transcends a feeling of powerlessness when he inadvertently comes up with a brilliant idea about how to organize cooking groups, and others join him in implementing it.

Dancing with Discomfort: Thoughts on Empowerment from a Reluctantly Powerful Person

Communities 148, 38–40
Kristina Jansen
Welcomed back into her childhood community as an adult, the author comes to terms not only with her intrinsic reluctance to be in charge of anything, but also with her own inherent power.

Power and Disempowerment on the Ecobus

Communities 148, 41–47
Chris Roth
Some saw this radical environmental education program as a “cult,” others as an intensely focused experience of challenge and growth. Had participants lost their individuality, or gained a new sense of self?

Gender Dynamics in Cooperative Groups

Communities 162, 6–8
Laird Schaub
Intentional community is an incredibly potent laboratory for experimenting with gender dynamics in pursuit of a better life for all.

Gender: Is There a “There” There?

Communities 162, 10–11
Chris Roth
Gender is a continuum, not a strict duality—and our identities and relationships are much more nuanced and rich than traditional gender definitions would have them be.

On This Episode of “Girls with Tools”

Communities 162, 12–13
Cole Wardell
At The Midden, members confront the effects of patriarchy not only in their outside activism, but also within their community.

Particulate Matter

Communities 162, 14–15
Molly Shea
Unconscious gender-related expectations, inequities, and trauma can exert pervasive influence even in groups committed to undoing them.

Sexism at Dancing Rabbit

Communities 162, 16–19
Sam Makita
At a community founded in feminism, a member suggests that strategies like corrective discrimination, single-gender gatherings, and prioritizing “gender balance” may themselves be sexist.

Gender-Bending on the Commune

Communities 162, 24–25
Valerie Renwick
When a Twin Oaks member leads a tour, “co” must “address the dress” (when appropriate) and wear a shirt, whether or not participating in the collective menstrual calendar.

Evolving Gender Consciousness in New Culture Camps

Communities 162, 28–33
Oblio Stroyman
A genderqueer member helps a community move beyond its past assumptions by offering workshops on exploring and expanding concepts of sex and gender identity.
An Apache childhood lays the groundwork for a lifelong dedication to cultivating self-esteem and personal wholeness in community.

Intentional communities have great potential for addressing questions of class, race, and privilege—and also a LOT of work to do in all of these areas before reality can catch up to ideals.

Bonded by a shared mission, indigenous water protectors and their white allies find a safe space for giving and receiving honest feedback about white privilege and unconscious acts of racism.

Familiar with both privilege and marginalization, a queer Latina cohouser shares experiences and perspectives on confronting racial and ethnic homogeneity.

A Japanese-American Baby Boomer reflects on how cohousing can confront privilege and prejudice, instill cultural competency, and increase diversity in its population.

A cohousing project’s budget can help address class and classism—but the community also needs to articulate and explore its culture’s underlying or hidden rules.

Are ecovillages inherently elitist? Members of one share their thoughts and questions.

A co-owner of Heart-Culture Farm Community explores ways to use her privilege to help create a society where people are truly equal.

A diverse community gives us better opportunities to challenge systems of oppression that operate within ourselves, in our circles of relationship, and throughout the larger world.

Catholic Worker communities throughout the Midwest examine themselves, make changes, and reach out in an effort to overcome the insidious influences of white supremacy.

Easing themselves in and out of each other’s houses, yards, and chicken coops, members of White Hawk Ecovillage find traditional borders becoming more porous.
Morehouse—Choosing Your Family
Communities 146, 35–39
Judy St. John, Ilana Firestone, and Marilyn Moohr, with Arlene Goens and Ben Oliver

You can pick your friends but you can’t pick you family? The members of Lafayette Morehouse would beg to differ, although the Cleavers they are not.

Second Family.
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A mother responds to empty-nest syndrome by discovering her new family in community.

G8
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Lawrence Siskind
They don’t represent any governments, they don’t live together, and there are nine of them, not eight, but these polyamorous friends still feel empowered to love each other, addressing one another with the f-word: family.

Exploring Family
Communities 146, 46–50
Chris Roth
What do Hopi Indians, John Keats, lost loves, intentional community, and family have in common? For better or worse, they’ve combined to befuddle, enlighten, dismay, and inspire our author.

Review: Together and Apart
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Chris Roth
A memoir about life in a convent causes the reviewer to uncloister his thought habits about the differences between secular and religious intentional communities.

Being Vigilant About Vigilante Dynamics
Communities 150, 6, 9
Laird Schaub
Let’s not use mental health labels to stigmatize and categorize those we find difficult.

Crazy About Community
Communities 150, 11, 13
Chris Roth
If the editor is off his rocker, can community furnish the solution?

Gifted, Mad, and Out of Control
Communities 150, 14–17
Alexis Zeigler
The author recounts his personal history with the “mentally ill”—social misfits who can show us the way to a better world, if they are allowed to make the journey.

Walking Wounded
Communities 150, 18–21
Gigi Wahba
Born into a society pervaded by mental stress, the author reflects on approaches to mental wellness in her family, her former spiritual community, and her current group.

The Influence of Community on Mental Health
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[Cindy Baranco, Ilana Firestone, Marilyn Moohr, and Judy St. John]
The best way of supporting those with mental health issues is to keep them involved in community life, relating to them as whole people rather than marginalizing them.

Hand in Hand, Heart to Heart: Peer Counseling in Community
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Amara Karuna
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approaches to inner wellness as they reunite online.

Rx for “Mental Illness”: Caring Community .................................................. 299
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A Nomad Ponders Family and the Ecstasy of the Group ................................. 303
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To a former communitarian and long-time student of community, utopian experiments—some sweet,
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A starter marriage, a spouse's health crisis, and the small details that define each person shed light on the
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Intimacy in the Village Setting ..................................................................... 323
Communities 151, 35–37  Ted Sterling
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Communities 151, 38–39  Alline Anderson
Women’s Empowerment Circles offer community-within-community, building trust, caring, and mutual
support.
Do you think a half-century-old book on proper “womanhood,” much of whose advice is guaranteed to cause feminists to scream out in indignation, has nothing to teach us? Think again.

Embracing the spiritual path of community means dedicating oneself to exploring the human being.

Communities and their members can change and drift apart, but the lessons and tools gained in community endure.

A “community kid” recognizes that communities, neighborhoods, and institutions all benefit by encouraging true sharing and vulnerability.

Diversity, ritual, storytelling, generosity, and open discussions of power all facilitate healthy group-living dynamics.

New Culture Camps and communities offer numerous skills and insights to enhance happiness, wholeness, and connection.

In a relationship’s ending at Sunrise Ranch, children gain rather than lose parents.

Living in an extended community family brings joy, challenge, and new worlds of possibility.

Long-dormant childhood gender issues resurface in an intimate relationship in community—and this time avoidance and escape aren’t options.

Community grows when we make time to share our stories, enjoy one another, take care of one another, and work on building a better world together.

For intentional community members, community comes with added benefits, unique challenges, and a call to authenticity.

Is community living the best thing since sliced bread, or the worst thing since sliced bread? It depends who—and when—you ask.
Transparency, Vulnerability, Interdependence, and Collaboration: An Intergenerational Perspective from a Boomer and a Millennial

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Melanie Rios and Skye Rios

We will realize our collective power by embracing a new paradigm that replaces our inherited emphasis on confidentiality, stoicism, and independence.

How to Live Together in Harmony

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Cedar Rose Selenite

Whether in a family, a roommate situation, an intentional community, or a working group, these five skills can help us coexist harmoniously.

Ecosexuality: Embracing a Force of Nature

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Lindsay Hagamen

Only when we create a container that is loving enough and strong enough to embrace the erotic, do we create a container that is loving enough and strong enough to embrace all of Life itself.

Remembering Zendik: Mating in Captivity

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Helen Zuman’s debut book describes in detail her six-year-long involvement with a radical intentional community that also fits many people’s definition of “cult.”

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Valerie Renwick-Porter

When it comes to talking about politics, some topics are like opening a can of worms while walking through a field of landmines.

Bursting the Bubble: The Challenges of Progressive Community Living in the Rural South

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Doug Alderson

Everyone needs a bubble—whether of “light,” of security, or of connection—but it can also be too rigid and confining.

Zoning Nightmare: Hartford’s Scarborough Street House

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Dave Rozza, Hannah Simms, Josh Blanchfield, Julia Rosenblatt, Kevin Lamkins, Laura Rozza, Maureen Welch, and Simon Raahauge DeSantis

An unconventional family fights to stay in their collective house in the face of antiquated local ordinances which suppress community living.

Neighbor Nightmare in Northern California

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Chris Roth

When the calling to cultivate community is combined with good intentions, what can go wrong? The answer is: a lot.

Public vs. Private: Group Dilemma Laid Bare!

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M. Broiling and T. Shirtless

For some neighbors, the logical leap from “glimpse of skin” to “nudist colony” is a surprisingly short one to make.

Lessons in Participatory Democracy

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Sylvan Bonin

After being blindsided by “dumb growth” developments on their borders, Songaia residents debate how involved to become in protecting land beyond their own neighborhood.

White Bias, Black Lives: When Unconscious Bias Affects Your Community

_Communities_ 178, 23–25

Katy Mattingly

Members of Sunward Cohousing recognize and attempt to transform their community’s differential treatment of white-skinned and dark-skinned neighborhood children.