

Building Online Communities with Discourse

Your guide to building online spaces and encouraging engagement with Discourse forum

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- [Intro](#)
- [Credits](#)
- [Case Study](#)
- [1: Stakeholders](#)
 - [Audience](#)
- [2: Power Map](#)
 - [Impacts](#)
- [3: Stakeholder Needs](#)
 - [Actual Needs](#)
 - [Finding the Right Tool](#)
 - [Fulfilling the Needs](#)

Intro

Online communities are essential, and Discourse forums stand out as a crucial tool in creating engaging digital spaces. This book is about building such Discourse communities, and is meant for two key audiences:

For NGOs and Community Builders: Discover how to bring your community online with healthier interactions and engagement.

For Tech Enthusiasts: If you're searching for the right forum tool to build communities or eager to help NGOs establish their forums, this guide is for you.

Let's start with Discourse forums and unlock the potential of creating vibrant online communities.

Credits

I would like to extend my gratitude to **Shemeer** for his invaluable help in structuring the book and providing insightful ideas and suggestions, to **Sumi** for her assistance in refining the writing and content, and to **Megha** for her creative ideas and contributions. Your support and contributions have played a significant role in shaping this book and making it a reality.

Case Study

1: Stakeholders

Audience

By examining the case study, it's clear that a sense of community or a safe online space is lacking.

But **why is it important to bring people together, and how does it benefit them?**

- **Facilitates Communication and Networking**
- **Encourages Resource Sharing**
- **Enhances Transparency**

Who Are the Needy People?

These are the individuals who are likely in need of being brought together:

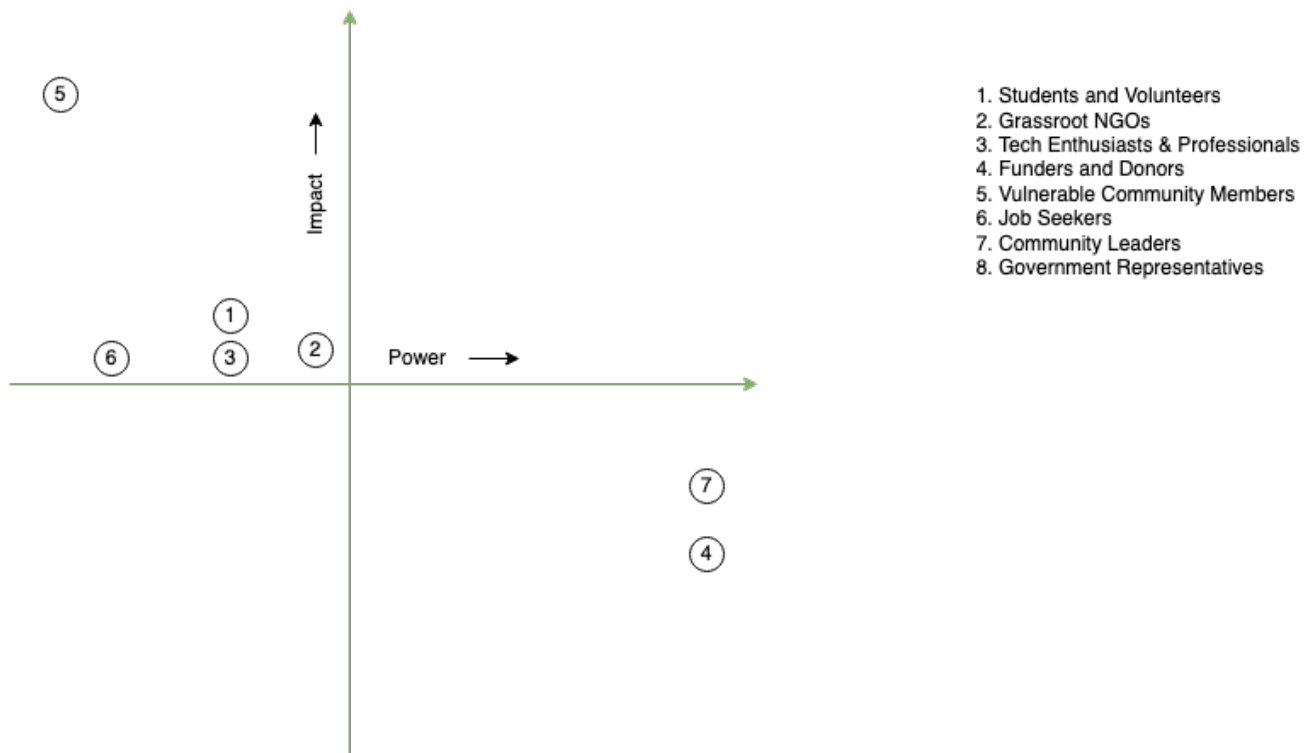
- **Students and Volunteers**
- **Grassroot NGOs**
- **Tech Enthusiasts & Professionals**
- **Funders and Donors**
- **Vulnerable Community Members**
- **Job Seekers**
- **Community Leaders**
- **Government Representatives**

2: Power Map

2: Power Map

Impacts

Now, let's explore the impacts created by an open online community on stakeholders, considering the influence and power they hold.



3: Stakeholder Needs

Actual Needs

Now, let's think about the actual needs of our stakeholders. What are the fundamental requirements they might have?

- **Students and Volunteers:** To contribute, learn, and connect with like-minded individuals.
- **Grassroot NGOs:** To communicate, collaborate, ask for help and feedback, and share insights within their communities.
- **Funders and Donors:** To see impactful projects, transparent communication, and opportunities to support meaningful initiatives.
- **Vulnerable Community Members:** A safe space to share experiences, seek support, and get proper resources and knowledge.
- **Job Seekers:** To explore employment opportunities.
- **Community Leaders:** To engage in discussions to share best practices, to bring people together, exchange ideas, and help in community development.
- **Government Representatives:** Seeking insights, collaboration, to offer support and to open communication with NGOs and other grassroots communities.

Finding the Right Tool

For this use case, the need for an online forum arises from the identified lack of a community or safe online space. An online forum, especially **Discourse Forum**, becomes the ideal solution for several reasons:

- **FOSS (Free and Open-Source Software):** Discourse is free to use and open-source, allowing for customization and community-driven development.
- **Self-Hostable and Data Security:** Being self-hostable gives organizations control over their data and security measures.
- **Seamless Browser and Email Integration:** Discourse provides a user-friendly experience both in-browser and through email notifications, ensuring easy access and engagement.
- **Flexibility and Customizability:** Discourse offers a high degree of flexibility, allowing organizations to tailor the forum to their specific needs and branding.
- **Great Moderation Features:** Discourse provides powerful moderation tools to keep discussions respectful, safe, and on-topic.
- **Encourages Engagement:** With features like likes, replies, and notifications, Discourse encourages active participation and community building.

There are alternative platforms also, such as:

- Flarum
- phpBB
- Vanilla Forums
- vBulletin

Fulfilling the Needs

Let's discuss how each feature in the Discourse forum can help GuideStarIndia build and nurture its community:

- **Topics or Conversations:** The ability to share resources, guides, and other valuable content with the community. Discourse's editor supports proper markdown, external links, and resource embedding, ensuring that information is presented effectively.
- **Effective Discussions:** Discourse offers features like chat-like threads for topics, polls, and personal messaging, facilitating engaging and interactive discussions within the community.
- **Admin Dashboard:** The admin dashboard allows GuideStar India to identify community health metrics and analyze user engagement, helping them make informed decisions to improve the community.
- **Trust System and Badges:** Discourse's trust system and badges motivates community members to become trusted regulars. As members earn badges, they gain abilities to help maintain the community, fostering a sense of ownership and responsibility.
- **100% Open Source:** Being a free and open-source software hosted on GuideStar India's own DigitalOcean servers ensures data privacy and security, crucial for building trust among community members.
- **Categorization:** Discourse allows topics to be properly tagged and categorized, making it easier for users to find relevant information and engage with specific topics of interest.
- **Groups:** Discourse's group feature allows GuideStar India to create internal and external groups for communication. External groups can be categorized to distinguish each nonprofit based on their certifications, facilitating effective communication and collaboration within the community.