How to Build Community In Your Practice

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Do you want to connect with similar-minded practitioners but have no idea how? Have you ever felt isolated in your practice, not really knowing where you fit? Does the idea of attending events all the time overwhelm you? Do you feel comfortable attending events but don't know what to do at the event or after?

Finding and fostering community is in the heart of any creative practice: it constitutes a system of support, facilitates creation, collaboration, experimentation and growth. Connection as well as collaboration between artists and designers can lead to the development of new exhibitions and publications as well as to innovations in practice, communities of discourse, and even larger cultural movements!

Defining Community

Think of your community as the ecosystem that fosters your creative pursuits. It should include people who are your ride-or-dies; a patchwork of family, friends, peers or colleagues, mentors and advisors. Your community should expand beyond your practice and be as cross-disciplinary as it can be. For example: if you're a burgeoning artist, your ideal community would include others who work with artists such as aspiring and established curators, art critics, carpenters and other production specialists, but also designers who can lend a critical eye to your website, an editor who can glance at your grant application, and many others.

When defining community, it's also important to consider how a community differs from an audience. Audiences are constituted on a transactional relationship; it's a one-directional way of exchanging information which means one of the parties will be passive. As a result, audiences remain metrics-based and not as loyal. Community, on the other hand, is a long-term reciprocal engagement that holds a deeper level of connection and commitment from all those involved.

Seeking Out Your People, Your Spaces

Community building is established through the process of mindful networking: the exchange of information or services among individuals, groups or institutions. When seeking out community, ask yourself the following questions:

- Who do I have common ground or similar interests with?

- Whose work do I like? Whose work do I respect?

- Who has the same philosophy as me?

- Who can I invite and integrate into my circle?

- Who can I collaborate with?

One of the easiest ways to find like-minded people is through a communal space: for some, this may be a learning environment such as a university, a particular class, a series of workshops or simply a studio space. For others, it may be a club, an organization or a digital forum where they feel represented. The best way to figure out where you fit is to try the following:

When at university:

- Talk to your faculty: maintain relationships with faculty for future advice, seek out opportunities from sessional faculty who are active in their field

- Help friends and classmates with their projects

- Think about possible collaborations— build or create something with others

Seeking Out Your People, Your Spaces

Locally:

- Scope out your local scene and attend shows, openings and events

- Go to events, meetups, and conferences

- Volunteer at a conference or an event

- Get involved with a relevant organization, such as an artist-run-centre

- Follow local creatives you connect with on social media

- Connect with your studio mates

- Join clubs, societies

Don't be discouraged if the type of community that you're looking for doesn't seem to be locally present — you can always become the organizer of a community you wish to see and carve out a space for yourself. Here are some general tips that can help you feel empowered when building community:

Know how to leverage your social media for exposure.

Sometimes, this can offer more attention than traditional means and carve out new paths for you.

Stay connected to an online group.

Chat on a forum on a website, join a group on a social media channel, share within a group chat.

Stay connected to relevant news in your field.

Follow news accounts, various organizers on social media, subscribe to a mailing list, borrow a relevant magazine from the library.

8 Tips for Face-to-Face Interactions

1. Make an effort to meet other artists and creatives.

Nobody works in isolation. Whether you are an introvert or an extrovert, find an activity that is comfortable enough for you and get out there. You can sign up to volunteer for organizations you want to be affiliated with or attend meetings, openings, workshops and events—in whatever you wish to pursue, make yourself a familiar face! And you can always go with a friend, especially if they are also looking to build connections just like you...

2. Relax.

Meeting people can be fun but also quite overwhelming and stressful, especially if you're shy or anxious. Simply start conversations and connecting with others by asking questions. Stay calm and try to enjoy the process of getting to know people who share the same interests as you—you never know where it might lead. When in doubt, start asking questions about the other person. Just be yourself, you don't have to act in any one particular way.

3. Know how to talk about your practice.

You will often be asked the question: "What do you do?"—have an elevator speech ready so you will know exactly what to say in these situations. This only needs to be a few sentences (1 minute or less) including who you are, what you're interested in, and what you want to do in the future or what you do now. Don't be embarrassed to say the same thing to a bunch of different people - it's not fake, it's just repetition.

4. Build genuine relationships, don't sell.

Don't speak like you're conducting a sales pitch! Focus on forming genuine relationships through common ground and interests. Be natural—when meeting new people, remember to ask questions about their practices or their design philosophies. People like talking about themselves!

8 Tips for Face-to-Face Interactions

5. Have your own contact details handy.

Only offer your contact information if you're asked. Do not go around handing out your business card to everybody—it will come across as being pushy. If you don't even want to have a business card, just be sure to get the name of the person you're talking with, google them, and follow up the next day with a quick "hello and nice to meet you" e-mail or an IG follow.

6. Find a way to stay in touch.

Whether it's through social media or giving a business card, remember to ask for contact details from those you connected with based on honest common interests.

When following up with an email, a direct message or with an invite to something, or to set up a future appointment, remember to reiterate who you are and mention where you met them. Bring up the projects that the person has produced and convey your interest in their work—including what you find compelling about it. Be mindful when following up with people you've just met. People don't like feeling like they're being used or that you're trying to get something from them.

7. Be intentional about your interactions.

Be selective about the deep connections that you can maintain. Your community does not have to be a large group—focus on the details that are important to you and build your community based on these details and values.

8. Help yourself by helping others.

Hold a "pay it forward" attitude; share success in collaborations. Create relationships based on positive interactions and goodwill.

Offer yourself as a resource and assist other artists, designers, photographers or filmmakers on their projects—this can be as simple as providing tips, words of encouragement and useful discussion.

Creating, Carving or Claiming Your Own Space

Don't wait for opportunities to come knocking on your door! Vancouver has a unique context in the sense that it is home to a robust creative community, yet accessible spaces within the city remain scarce. This context historically manifested as a vibrant and resilient DIY space culture, making the city home to Canada's very first artist-run-centre, Intermedia, in the 1960s. Don't forget that you too are a part of this rubric: there's nothing stopping you from being part of the history of the city.

Consider forming your own not-for-profit organization, your own artist-run-centre, or co-operative. If you can afford it, consider having your own studio as part of your practice. A studio can serve as a venue for your own work and allows the opportunity to exhibit your work during open studios and shows. You can gather your peers from a variety of backgrounds to find a shared studio space. For example, if you're an emerging artist with commercial aspirations, don't overly focus on gallery representation—organize your own open studios, establish an art night, or get in touch with a local business to hold a pop-up exhibition.

Designers can host informal pin-ups or charettes, or ask to visit other studios to see how they're set up.

Last but not least, know that community building takes time and can at times cause burnout. Especially when you're introducing something new, you may be limited by factors outside of your control. If you face a problem, channel your creativity, be empathetic, and stay organized. A connected community is a powerful alternative to the powerlessness of isolation and passivity.

Cultural Communities in Vancouver

Going out and getting involved with your local art and design communities is one of the best ways to meet compatible creatives that can elevate your practice. If you don't know where to start, here's a list of cultural organizations in Vancouver whose programming include exhibitions, talks, fairs, and more.

Before delving into the list, make sure you sign up for Instant Coffee, which sends out a list of cultural events every Thursday morning. You can also submit your call/event on Instant Coffee for free.

Art: Artist-Run-Centres, Art Galleries, Commercial Galleries and More

Note: Most art openings are on Thursdays.

- 221A
- Access Gallery
- Arts Assembly
- Artspeak
- Audain Gallery @ Goldcorp Centre
- Audain Faculty of Arts, Emily Carr (Talks + Events)
- Burrard Art Foundation

- Brick Press
- Burnaby Art Gallery
- Canzine
- CARFAC BC
- Catriona Jeffries
- Centre A
- Contemporary Art Gallery
- Current Feminist Symposium and Mentorship program
- Dynamo Arts Association
- Duplex Duplex
- Eastside Culture Crawl
- Equinox Gallery
- Experimental Media Outsiders
- FEMMES (Femmes Engaging Multimedia and Evolving Systems)
- Fillip/Projectile Publishing Society
- Gallery Gachet
- Gallery Jones
- Griffin Art Projects
- grunt gallery
- Hot Art Wet City
- Intermediate Media Arts Educational Festival
- Libby Leshgold Gallery
- LIVE Biennale
- Lumiere YVR
- Malaspina Printmakers Society

Cultural Communities in Vancouver

- Mobil Art School
- Monte Clark
- Monica Reyes Gallery
- Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery
- Museum of Anthropology
- Museum of Vancouver
- New Forms Festival
- Or Gallery
- Other Sights
- Polygon Gallery
- Powell Street Festival
- Queer Arts Festival
- READ Books
- Red Gate Arts Society
- Rennie Museum
- Richmond Art Gallery
- SFU Gallery
- SUM Gallery
- Surrey Art Gallery
- Teck Gallery
- The Future is you and me
- The James Black Gallery
- Unit 17
- UNIT/PITT Projects
- VALU Co-op
- Vancouver Art Book Fair
- Vancouver Art Gallery (Emily Carr students get free memberships!)

- Vancouver Biennale
- Vancouver Writers Festival
- Western Front
- VIVO Media Arts Centre
- WAAP

Design

- City of Vancouver Solutions Lab
- IDS West
- Ladies Learning Code
- Ladies that UX Vancouver
- Spacing Vancouver
- UBC School of Architecture + Landscape Architecture (Talks and Events)
- UBC UX Hub
- Vancouver Design Nerds
- Vancouver Design Week
- Women Who Code Vancouver

Film

- Canadian Cinema Editors
- Celluloid Social Club
- Cineworks
- CMPA-BC
- Crazy 8s Film Society
- Creative BC

Cultural Communities in Vancouver

- DGC BC
- Directors Guild of Canada – BC (Directors and Locations, Production Assistants etc)
- DOCBC
- DOXA
- Frameworks Experimental Film Listserve
- Field and Post
- IATSE Local 118 (Stagehands and Theatre Technicians)
- IATSE Local 891 (Accounting, Lighting, Art, Make-Up, Construction, Painting, Costume, Production Office, Editing, Props, First Aid/Craft Service, Script Supervisors, Set Decorating, Greens, Sound, Grips, Special Effects, Hair, Visual Effects)
- ICG Local 669 (Camera, Stills Photographers, Unit Publicists, Digital Engineers + Techs, Camera Trainees)
- Independent Media Arts Alliance
- Iris Film Collective
- Teamsters Local 155 (Transportation, Security, Catering, Animal Handlers)
- Union of BC Performers/ACTRA (Actors, Stunts, Background Performers)
- Vancouver Asian Film Festival
- Vancouver International Film Festival
- Vancouver Latin American Film Festival
- Vancouver Post Alliance
- Vancouver Queer Film Festival
- Vancouver Short Film Festival
- VIVO Media Arts Centre
- Women and Film & TV Vancouver
- The Writers Guild of Canada (Screenwriters)

Illustration

- ArtBreakers Illustration Society
- CAPIC (The Canadian Association of Professional Image Creators)
- Mobil Art School
- Rain City Illustration
- Vancouver Sketch Club

Animation

- Spark CG Society
- Vancouver Animation Network
- Women in Animation Vancouver

List of Studio Spaces in Vancouver

- 221A
- Arts Factory
- Betamax Studios
- BC Artscape

Cultural Communities in Vancouver

- City of Vancouver Artist Studio Award Program
- Duplex Duplex
- Parker Art Salon
- Sunset Terrace
- The Beaumont Studios
- The Mergatroid Building

Coworking/Event Spaces in Vancouver

- HiVE
- SPACE
- ThisOpenSpace (List of spaces you can book for events or short term production)
- WeWork

Appendix

This document is based on the Skill Up Session delivered by Shannon McKinnon, Director, Career Development + Work Integrated Learning Office in Fall 2019. Skill Up Series are co-hosted and co-produced by Career Development + Work Integrated Learning Office and the Shumka Centre for Creative Entrepreneurship at Emily Carr University of Art + Design. These resources are produced with the generous support of the Ministry of Advanced Education, Skills & Training.

The Career Development + Work Integrated Learning Office connects students and alumni with local, national and international employers in the creative industries and beyond. We offer career advising, clinics and strategy sessions, drop-in and individual advising, access to work integrated learning opportunities such as co-ops and internships, co-curricular programming, and industry networking events, as well as the Arts-work career portal.

The Shumka Centre for Creative Entrepreneurship launched in 2018 to create programs and partner-ships that help artists and designers realize their ideas in the world. The Centre is a place where creative practitioners can find the community, knowledge, and resources they need to launch, fund, and organize projects across the spectrum of contemporary art and design activities- products, projects, curatorial initiatives, platforms, compa-nies, organizations, and more. We believe that tac-tical support specifically designed for the needs of artists and designers is the first step in achieving a systemic change to empower creative people. The Centre is operated by Living Labs.

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