

WAO

HELPING PEOPLE UNDERSTAND
THE BADGES LANDSCAPE

Keep Badges Weird: a case study

(October 2022)



Intro

As we build communities, we seek to create safe, interesting spaces for people to learn and be social. The Participate platform is a go-to place for social learning with recognition, and it's where we've been building a Community of Practice (CoP) called Keep Badges Weird. This case study looks at this community and how it is supported on Participate..

What is Keep Badges Weird?

Keep Badges Weird (KBW) is a CoP of people interested in the intersection of Open Badges (a web-native way of issuing recognition) and CoPs.

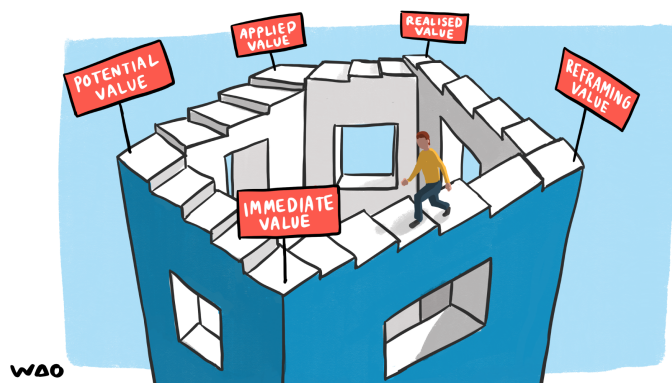
We are a community with people who have invented and pioneered badge systems, technologies, standards and everything else badges. People in this community are front line educators, programme designers and learner advocates. We are the people who are motivated and influential in getting organisations to start thinking about upskilling in a non-traditional way. It's a place in which we acknowledge contribution badges can recognise participation, creation, and reflection, as well as act as credentials.

This document uses the Keep Badges Weird (KBW) community as a case study to provide practical examples for the various models and tactics we've used to build a CoP on the Participate platform.



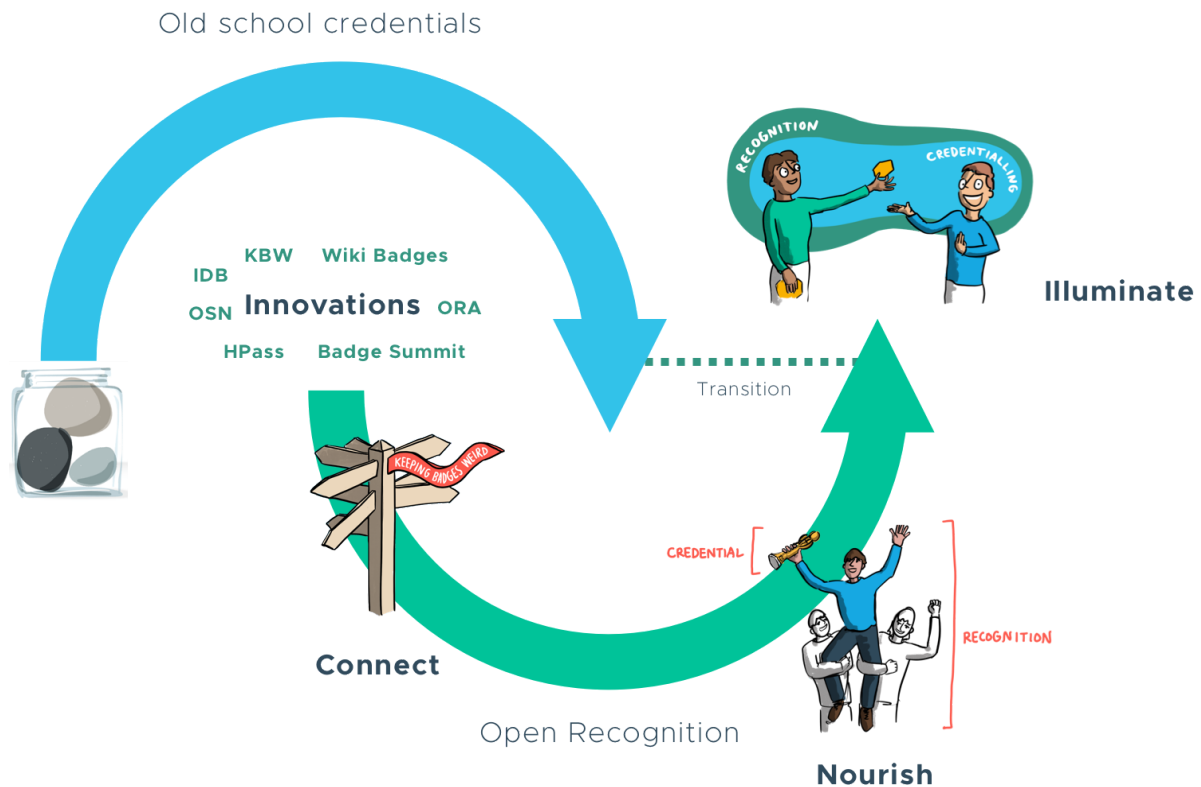
Strategy

Our big idea when starting the KBW community was give people both the theory and practice of CoPs and badges. It's all very well learning about 'value cycles' but there's nothing like *experiencing* them, along with earning Open Badges. At the same time, we wanted to create intersections and



pathways to other communities and establish a place for a meta conversation about CoPs and Badges.

Having been active in the Open Badges landscape for over a decade, as we began to build the community we realised that we were doing this work to help an alternative system of recognition evolve as the old system of credentialing begins to sunset.

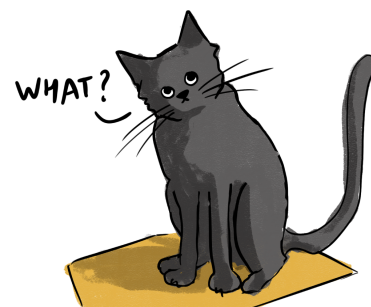


[The Two Loops Model for Open Recognition advocacy](#)

As a result, our work became as much about advocacy for a different way of using Open Badges within a CoP as it did providing a space for people to come together to learn about these two ideas as they currently stand.

The vision for KBW

We wish to disrupt and transform institutional thinking around how recognition is “supposed” to work. The KBW community can offer guidance, tools and approaches to encourage change, and we can show the business case of how it is practical, empowering and profitable to use Open Recognition.



Open Recognition is the awareness and appreciation of talents, skills and aspirations in ways that go beyond credentialing. This includes recognising the rights of individuals, communities, and territories to apply their own labels and definitions. Their frameworks may be emergent and/or implicit. ([What is Open Recognition anyway?](#))

Using Open Recognition in the KBW community is an effort to try to make everyone feel welcome. We help people understand that there is no one 'correct' way of doing recognition, and we aim to be a 'big tent' for all kinds of initiatives. For example, members of the KBW community are active in other spaces ranging from the [Open Skills Network](#) to the [Verifiable Credentials for Education Task Force](#). By bringing together work from different areas and geographical regions, we can help one another learn what's possible.

In [advocating for learner-centric badge systems](#), our vision involves:

- **Coalition Building:** empowering people who want to KBW
- **Community Building:** reaching people that are uneasy about the top-down credentials
- **Building Capacity for Advocacy:** helping the community promote and champion open recognition
- **Community Organising:** celebrating people, giving them tools to show they're not alone
- **Communications and Messaging:** providing an understandable story and reusable assets for and with the community

Tactics

Community building should be emergent. We build together *with* the community, not *for* it. It's important to get people involved from the beginning. One way we engaged early adopters was to help them define what the KBW community stands for. [What are its values?](#) From there, we did some strategic planning, provided an on-ramp in terms of a memorable URL, and encouraged people to introduce themselves in fun ways. These approaches are all detailed in [this blog post](#).

Breaking things down, here's how we did it...

Gathering Allies

We began by gathering people together. We leaned on our existing networks, but also used a session at an online event to 'launch' the community. This meant lots of people joined together and meant we gained some traction.

Here are some other tips:

- **Start a community call** - gathering people together and asking them what they want is the best way to build a CoP that serves the needs of the individuals in it. A community call is an online meeting aimed at improving connections between community members and enhancing their co-operation.
- **Personal outreach** - we message every new member of the community, which now stands at hundreds of people. If they introduce themselves without being prompted, we respond to their introductory post and issue them a badge. If they haven't yet introduced themselves, we direct message them to say hello and encourage them to do so.
- **Collaborative agenda building** - in meetings or discussion threads, we try to make sure people know that we are hoping for their input. We ask people in the community what is important to them. Giving people a chance to have their voice heard, both literally and figuratively, is a vital part of them feeling like part of the community.



Image with bad poetry we used on Twitter to promote the new community

Code of Conduct

Every community needs to know what is acceptable and what is not. This can vary widely depending on the type of group, but there are enough core tenets that templates for developing Codes of Conduct have emerged over the last few years.

For the KBW community, we used the [Participate Code of Conduct](#), and in the past have used templates such as the [Contributor Covenant](#).

Community Canvas

We regularly use the [Community Canvas](#) to help us bring focus to the particular community we're trying to build. In the *Maturity Model* for community building (next paragraph) we talk about different stages a community goes through while maturing. For the stage between *Ignition* and *Liftoff* we decided to work with the *Community Canvas* to align our goals and define how the community can be supportive, positive and sustainable while maturing further. We made [a template](#) based on the KBW community.

The image shows a 'Community Canvas' for the 'Keep Badges Weird community'. It is a grid of 9 numbered sections, each with a title, a question, and a description of the community's approach. The canvas includes icons for each section and logos for WAO and community-canvas.org.

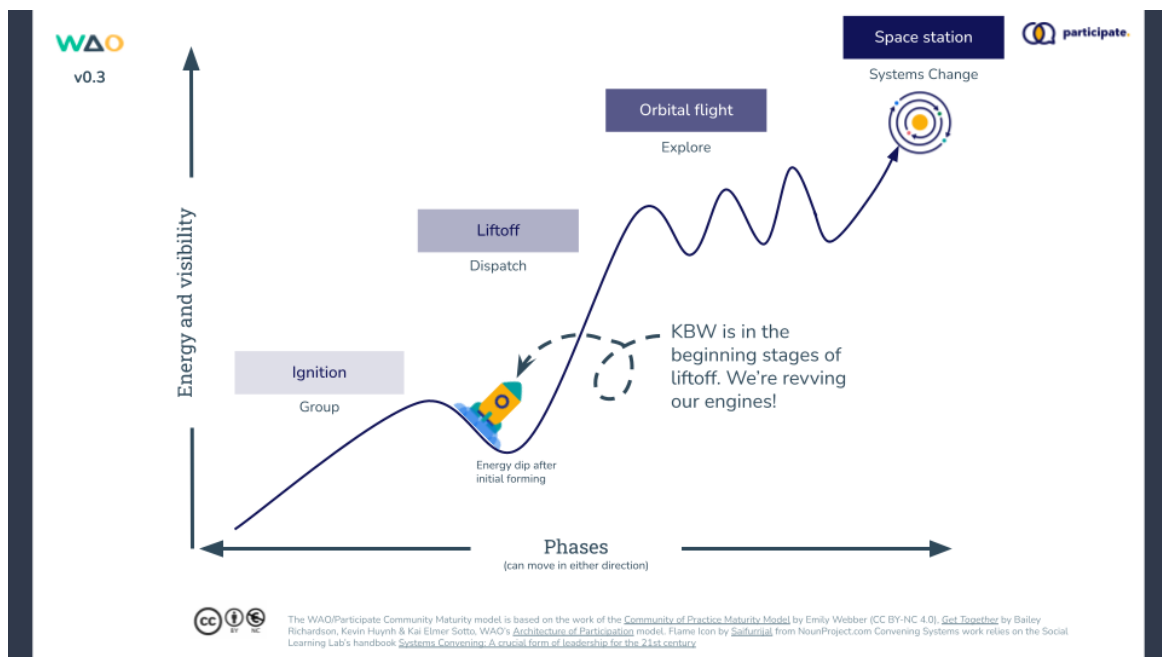
1 Purpose Why does the community exist?	2 Identity Who is this for and what is our selection process?	5 Experience What happens in our community on a recurring basis that helps us achieve our goals? Also consider onboarding: how does the experience in the community start?
KBW is a Community of Practice (CoP) for badge champions who want to counteract the top-down focus of institutions or corporations and ensure that the learner remains the beneficiary of badges.	Participate staff CoP Curious folks who are interested in badges Badge Champions	Onboarding: individuals introduce themselves using prompts (and earn the KBW badge) Weekly prompts: we actively post ideas and facilitate the CoP to help people engage Monthly community calls: Build solidarity Random: We try to find ways the community can work together through one-off events, research papers, projects and funding opportunities.
3 Values Which three principles are important to us?	4 Success Definition In the next twelve month what are three metrics that will define success for us?	
Trust – We are using and building a shared language, but trying to ensure that diverse voices can be heard. Integrity – We believe in honest discussion and admirable dissent. Advocacy – We build advocacy skills. Badging is about the learner, not the issuer.	1) Deputize at least 3 CoP Coaches and issue a ton of badges 2) End of 2022 the community is self-sustaining, with at least bi-weekly posts 3) The KBW CoP is a showcase example of the Participate platform.	
6 Roles What different roles can members play in our community?	7 Rules What guidelines and boundaries help us achieve our purpose and represent our values?	8 Governance How do we make decisions? Who gets to decide what?
Learners, OGs, Moderators, Harmony Keepers, Hoffmeisters, Firestarters	Code of Conduct: https://app.participate.com/conduct Manifesto: TBD Default to working openly! Signpost to other places: TBD	We use openness to help build consensus and encourage the decision making. Moderation, context : We use distributed leadership and encourage people to make their own decisions. The community needs to help decide some of this. Ready for next step meeting or community call? Can we self-organize?
9 Communication What are the simplest channels for us to communicate?		
Participate platform (discussion threads) Community calls Moderator (backstage)		

Maturity Model

Sometimes it's difficult to know what kind of interactions to expect within a community. For example, we can expect a level of cohesion and 'togetherness' that can take months, if not years, to establish. That's why we find Emily Webber's

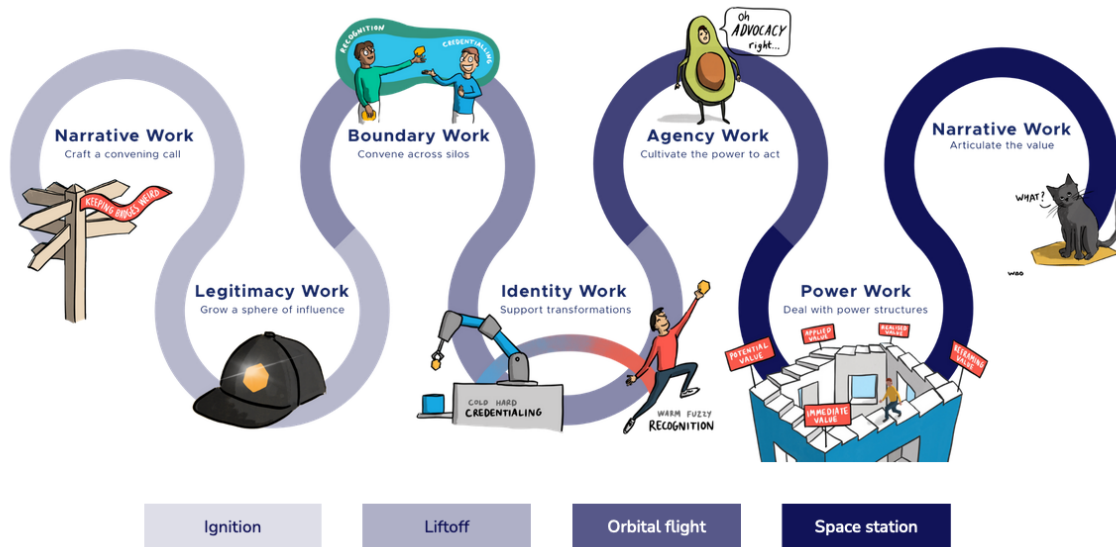
[Community of Practice Maturity Model](#) a helpful approach to figure out where a community is in its development.

For the KBW community, we remixed this model and [focused on the types of interactions](#) that were less common in the community. Doing this helped us determine activities and resources to help the community develop further. As we explained in the post [Towards a maturity model for online, networked communities](#), communities can grow both numerically and in maturity, and so continuing to feed them is important – even after it looks like they’re beginning to sustain themselves.



During the course of community building we discovered Etienne and Beverly Wenger-Trayner’s work on [convening systems](#) which we combined with the Maturity Model. This gives us an even better picture of the community development and what work has to be done for it to thrive.

KBW Convening systems work v.02

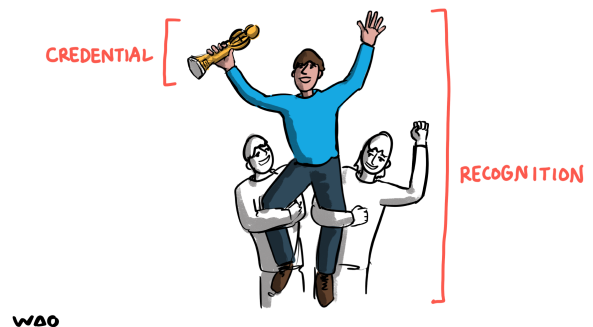


As you can see at the bottom of this convening systems diagram, we mapped the stages of the Maturity Model against it, so that we could be clear on the kind of work that needed to be done at each stage.

Recognition

The KBW project uses methodologies we call 'community as course' and 'learning through earning' methodologies. In other words, participants contribute by:

- **Participating** - and connecting in other communities
- **Creating** - something of value to others
- **Reflecting** - on what they have learned



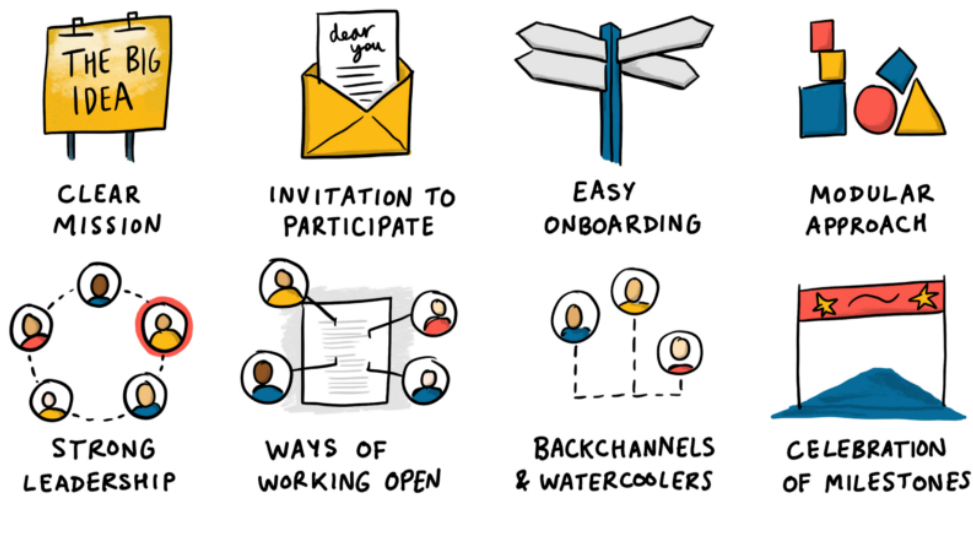
We use badges to recognise people and [encourage prosocial behaviours](#). The examples below show how this can be done in a fun, highly visual way. In addition, we chose to make some of these 'stealth' badges which means that they were not widely advertised to community members. Instead, moderators issued them based on members' organic interactions with one another.



Tech + Platforms

To build communities, we use our [Architecture of Participation](#) technique to help us ensure that we've covered all our bases. This is a model we've honed over the years, to ensure that we've made it as straightforward as possible for people to get involved with communities we set up and help flourish.

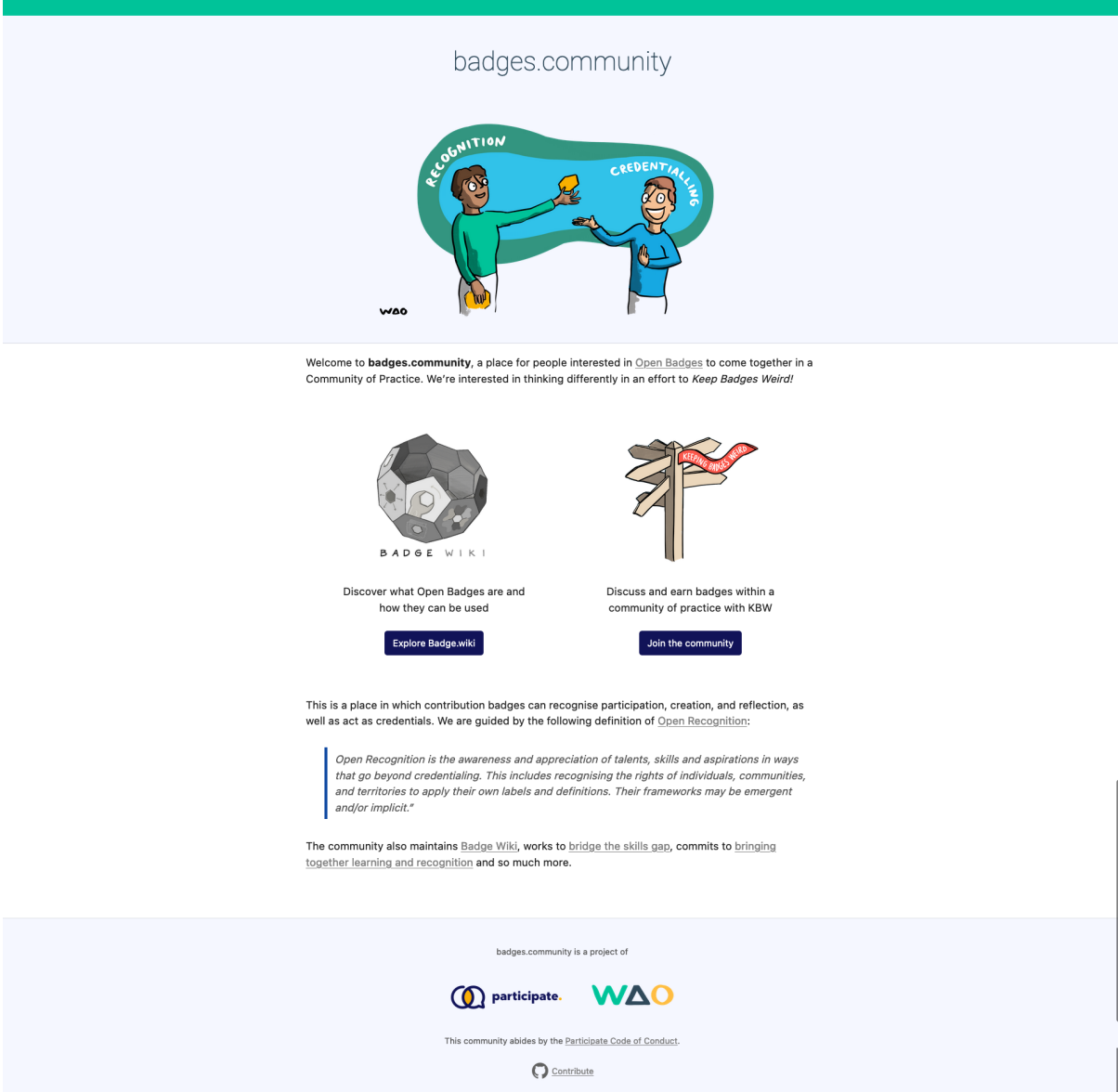
an architecture of participation



When it comes to technology, we've found that many community platforms are too sparse for the types of advanced interaction we're looking for. We are building social learning communities with embedded recognition, so we need a platform that can support some pretty complex interaction. That platform is, for us, "the internet", and it's how we weave together different tools that allow us to keep growing our communities.

A place to call home

Community members and potential community members need a relatively easy to remember link that they can call home. Often called “the canonical link”, this is the address community builders send to people. For the Keep Badges Weird community, we chose badges.community – this gives an overview of the community and links out to community projects and our main interaction space on the Participate platform.



The screenshot shows the homepage of badges.community. At the top, the text "badges.community" is centered. Below it is a cartoon illustration of two people, one holding a badge, with the words "RECOGNITION" and "CREDENTIALING" written in a cloud above them. The WAO logo is at the bottom left of the illustration. Below the illustration is a welcome message: "Welcome to badges.community, a place for people interested in Open Badges to come together in a Community of Practice. We're interested in thinking differently in an effort to Keep Badges Weird!". There are two main sections: "BADGE WIKI" with a description "Discover what Open Badges are and how they can be used" and a button "Explore Badge.wiki"; and "Join the community" with a description "Discuss and earn badges within a community of practice with KBW" and a button "Join the community". Below these is a quote about Open Recognition: "Open Recognition is the awareness and appreciation of talents, skills and aspirations in ways that go beyond credentialing. This includes recognising the rights of individuals, communities, and territories to apply their own labels and definitions. Their frameworks may be emergent and/or implicit." At the bottom, it says "The community also maintains Badge Wiki, works to bridge the skills gap, commits to bringing together learning and recognition and so much more." The footer includes "badges.community is a project of" with logos for "participate." and "WAO", and "This community abides by the Participate Code of Conduct." with a "Contribute" button.

badges.community

WAO

RECOGNITION CREDENTIALING

Welcome to **badges.community**, a place for people interested in [Open Badges](#) to come together in a Community of Practice. We're interested in thinking differently in an effort to *Keep Badges Weird!*

BADGE WIKI

Discover what Open Badges are and how they can be used

[Explore Badge.wiki](#)

Join the community

Discuss and earn badges within a community of practice with KBW

This is a place in which contribution badges can recognise participation, creation, and reflection, as well as act as credentials. We are guided by the following definition of [Open Recognition](#):

*Open Recognition is the awareness and appreciation of talents, skills and aspirations in ways that go beyond credentialing. This includes recognising the rights of individuals, communities, and territories to apply their own labels and definitions. Their frameworks may be emergent and/or implicit.**

The community also maintains [Badge Wiki](#), works to [bridge the skills gap](#), commits to [bringing together learning and recognition](#) and so much more.

badges.community is a project of

[participate.](#) [WAO](#)

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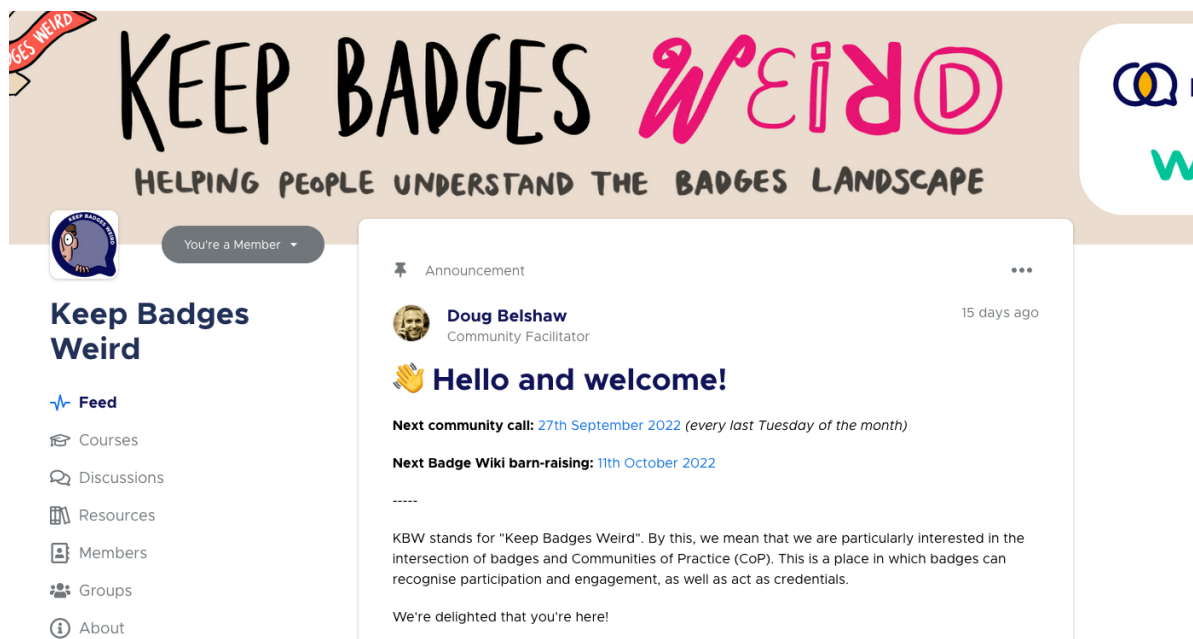
[Contribute](#)

Regular moderation and events

Consistency is key within a community. To keep a community engaged, there has to be something happening within it on a regular cadence. In the Keep Badges Weird

community, moderators set aside time every week to post announcements, answer discussions, share links, issue badges and encourage people who are interacting in the KBW space. This ensures that KBW members, unless they have opted-out, receive at least one email per week about what is going on in the community.

The KBW community also meets for two monthly community calls, one with a focus on whatever community members wish to discuss, with the other dedicated to work on a specific project ([Badge Wiki](#)). We use a platform that allows people to save calendar events, schedule reminders, and see when the next call is coming up called [Lu.ma](#).



Being open about it

Figuring out what a sprawling internet community is making and doing means paying attention to more than just the platform that is being used as the 'home' space. KBW members use various hashtags (e.g. #keepbadgesweird, #openbadges, #verifiablecredentials) to share things happening in the community. They also write blog posts and reflections that are posted on various social media.

We've found responding to these is important, which can be time-consuming. However, engaging outside of the platform then allows us either to encourage people to post inside the KBW community themselves, or for us to do it for them. It all adds to the feeling that there is a 'buzz' and things going on.

Final thoughts

Community-building is a time-consuming process that involves many things which are obvious, and many things which are not. Initial plans, and even the focus of the community, can change slightly as more people join it and start interacting. The important thing is to know what values the community stands for, as well as a goal (i.e. where it's headed).

With the KBW community, we've been delighted with the success we've had over the past 10 months, and have big plans for its future. It's clear to us that a platform that fuses Communities of Practice and Open Badges is a 'killer app' for community development centred around Open Recognition.



Next steps

Our next big goal is to slowly pivot the community to talk more about 'Open Workplace Recognition', as we've realised through conversations over the past few months that recognition within the workplace is sorely lacking. To reach this goal we divided the steps towards it into three main categories: **People**, **Product** and **Process**.

- **People**
 - In-person events to bring attention to the community and strengthen relationships
 - Connecting to other, related communities to find allies and grow the movement
- **Product**
 - Creating more content in the form of courses to fulfil the needs of community members
 - Providing feedback to Participate about how the platform can even better support the aims of the KBW community
- **Process**

- Continuing to publish blog posts about our thinking around the community and how it is developing
- Starting to put together badge pathways to recognise the contributions of members in a more scaffolded way