

Community Building In Indoor Climbing Gyms: Part 2

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Posted By: **Bix Firer** in [CWA Blog](#)



In our last article in this series, we outlined the benefits of focusing resources and energy on engaging your members, community, and employees in community-building programs. The research we cited is clear: by engaging your community of support, you increase your market presence, engage new customers, increase your public image, and help make happier employees.

Article At A Glance

- **Writer:** The Headwall Group, renowned programming experts within the indoor climbing industry. They're also presenters at the CWA Summit and have been writers with the CWA for years.
- **Who Should Read:** This article is primarily for program staff but also for senior management and even owners.
- **What Will You Learn:** Who your stakeholders are, what their needs could be, and how to talk to them.
- **Tie-Ins, Resources, or Further Reading:** This is the second article in a series on community building in indoor climbing gyms. [Definitely read the first one!](#)

In this article, we will highlight some common challenges, provide examples of calls to action, and discuss some possible community-building event ideas related to these. This will hopefully jump-start your creativity so you can start designing excellent community-building events at your gym that will help build your fanbase.

What is Your Call to Action?

Before planning anything, we need to know why we're doing it and who we're doing it for. First, your gym has many groups of "fans" and potential "fans" who your events can speak to.

These include:

- Current or potential members
- Youth participants and their families
- Employees (yes – even employees!)
- Other community organizations and institutions

And there are countless reasons we might want to engage with these fans. Examples include increasing membership, offering something new to existing members, improving the relationships between user groups, building new community partnerships, etc. Below we will list a few calls to action that address a specific fan group and a specific related challenge. Then, we will explore some possible creative approaches to each call to action.

- We will provide new incentives for current members to come in during slow hours.
- We will encourage current members to engage friends and family to build our membership base.
- We will support the families of our young climbers to increase the value of being a youth team participant.
- We will position ourselves as a strong member of the local recreation ecosystem.
- We will support our employees to help make them feel connected to the fun and meaningful work they are doing.

A call to action should address a specific challenge that our gym is experiencing or something specific we would like to improve on. Once we have our call to action, we can begin to think about what type of program we want to design that will activate the call to action to address the challenge and meet the needs of our fanbase.

Approaches to Calls to Action for Community Building

We will provide new incentives for current members to come in during slow hours.

To approach this call to action, we might look at visitation hours, determine the times that we are least engaged and see what kind of activities are most appropriate during these times. For instance, if your evening weekend hours are slow, could you plan trivia nights, proms and homecomings, or other fun events people associate with nightlife to draw them in and get them

climbing with a theme, during these underutilized hours?

We will encourage current members to engage friends and family to build our membership base.

Are you seeing plateaued visitor numbers? Or, is there a dip in the number of new members? Your programs might need to reach out to make folks who aren't already members feel welcome. One route to new membership is through folks who are already loyal members. While guest passes are the tried-and-true path to untapped potential, events and programs can be a great way to engage new members. You could offer half-price learn-to-climb lessons for folks who come in with a member, followed by a "meet a new belayer" social.

READ ALSO: Community Building Series Part 1

You might consider a clinic focused on helping new climbers succeed that has differentiated instruction for experienced and new climbers. Or, you could host a non-climbing event - for example, a movie, social, or demonstration - with a free pass to climb later.

We will support the families of our young climbers to increase the value of being a youth team participant.

Families of team climbers are usually great fans of our businesses, but they're not always active users. Converting these families to active users and cheerleaders requires us to think creatively. We might consider offering punch passes, exclusively for the caring adults in our young climbers' life, to use the fitness facilities or attend a yoga class, broadening our engagement with our community of support. We might also consider starting a booster club or cheer team for the youth programs, making sure these families understand their role in supporting our essential youth programs.

We will position ourselves as a vital member of the local recreation ecosystem.

Our gyms do not exist in a vacuum. Our members may be runners, skiers, bikers, trail advocates, or any number of other members of the recreation economies in our local communities. Consider ways that your facility can be a node around which this community is connected. Can you host coffee and climbing meetups for outdoor or recreation community members in your area? Can you engage with popular brand representatives to host clinics for your gear shop staff, clients, and community members? How can you engage with local athletes and advocates to share information about the resources in your community? What about a specific night where a percentage of each drop-in pass goes back to your recreation community?

We will support our employees to help make them feel connected to the fun and meaningful work they are doing.

The best employees feel connected to a mission. So, how can we remind our staff they are not just working for our gym, but they are also connected to something bigger?

To approach this, we can do things like pay staff to volunteer together at an event, close early once a quarter to host a staff-only bouldering competition or connect our staff to events happening externally. We can also put the planning of community-building events into the hands of our employees so that they have agency and ownership over the community they are helping build. We can help employees get involved in relevant events outside of our gym like Craggin' Classics or crag clean-up days.

How to Shape Your Calls to Action

Whatever type of event or program you offer to build your fanbase, it is essential that you know who you are trying to reach and what your goals are for them. This will be the compass that guides the planning and execution of excellent programs and events.

And, as you work through the planning of your programs and events, there are a few other things to consider:

Risk: What are our risks? Do we risk alienating current members, driving away programs, or stretching our staffing too thin? Are there additional liabilities associated with these programs? How are our facilities being tested?

Delivery: We have a great plan, but what does it look like when we make it happen? Every gym has staff whose job is to understand and deliver on operations. Use their expertise to make sure you deliver an excellent event.

Assessment: How will you know that the program or event you delivered met your intended goals? Before we deliver on a program, we must ensure we know what success looks like so we can assess if we have reached it. Be sure you are collecting data to compare, before and after rolling out new programs.

Continuous improvement: Nothing is perfect, especially the first time we do it. So, it is important to make decisions about how to move forward based on your assessments of your programs or events. Capitalize on things that work well and do not be afraid to adjust or abandon aspects of your programs and events that are not serving your overall goals.

Keep an eye out for future articles in this series as we continue to explore the benefits of community engagement.

Book a Pre-Conference with the Headwall Group at the CWA Summit

The Headwall Group is hosting an interactive pre-conference session at the CWA Summit about experiential programming. Don't miss it!

About the Headwall Group



The [Headwall Group](#) was founded by Bix Firer and Pat Brehm. Bix Firer (MA, University of Chicago) is an Associate Professor of Outdoor Studies at Alaska Pacific University and has worked as a wilderness educator, trainer, facilitator, and experiential educator for over a decade.



Pat Brehm works as a professional organizational trainer and has spent his career as a climbing coach, facilitator, and outdoor educator.



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