



BIOBORD
PLATFORM

BIOBORD NETWORK PARTNER GUIDE

Forum Facilitation



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Biobord platform and its joint operating model for the network has been developed in a user-centered, iterative design process involving open piloting with registered users from around the Baltic Sea Region. This development process has been carried out in the Interreg BSR projects RDI2CluB and ConnectedByBiobord both co-funded by the EU Regional Development Fund.

1. BIOBORD FORUM FOR PARTNERS

Biobord platform offers an open networking and co-working forum for a growing bioeconomy developers' community across the Baltic Sea Region. For the Biobord Network Partners, the Forum contains a closed area for co-working within the Biobord Network. Closed forum is titled 'Biobord Network' and it is accessible for all members of the partner organizations of the Biobord Network that are registered users of the Biobord platform. Co-working in the closed network forum is facilitated by the Biobord Network Secretary from JAMK University of Applied Sciences (see contacts from [Welcome to Biobord](#)). For more information on the activities of 'Biobord Network' discussion area, kindly check chapter 2 of this guide.

Besides the network co-working at the forum, our network partners also have a bridge builder role in the open activities of the Biobord Forum as described in chapter 3 of this guide. Furthermore, our network partners are able to open and facilitate their own network and project-based discussion areas on Biobord Forum. Opening, operating, and developing the partners' own forum communities is elaborated in chapter 4 of this guide.

**For further information on the Forum functionalities,
please review the following guidance and tips for Biobord users:**

[How to manage my profile and my preferences?](#)

[How to contact people via messages, chat and open forum?](#)

[How to join the discussion or create an own topic?](#)

[What are tags and how to use them?](#)

[Explore the groups and users at Biobord](#)

[FAQ of Biobord Forum](#)



2. BIOBORD NETWORK FORUM

Biobord Network is a closed discussion area for the Biobord Network Partners. Biobord Network Forum is accessible for all members of the partner organizations of Biobord Network that are registered users of the Biobord platform. In order to access the category, the registered user must send a 'Request' to join the 'Biobord Network' group on the group page of the Biobord Forum at <https://forum.biobord.eu/g>. Please note that the category, featured in Figure 1, is not visible to users that are not members of the group.

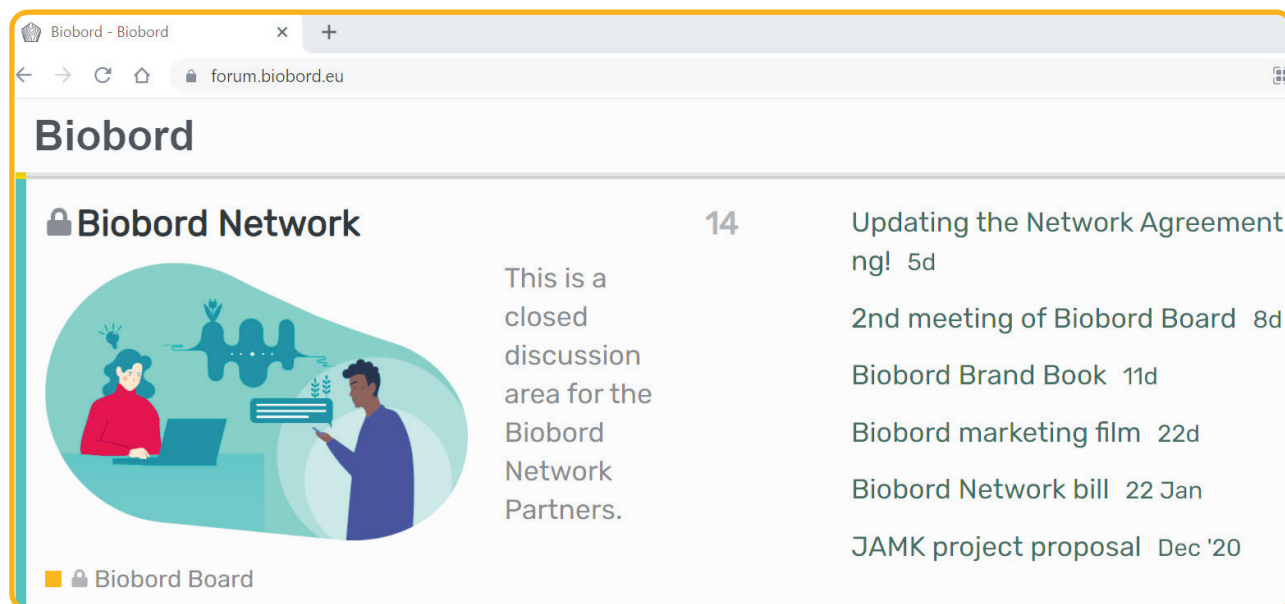


FIGURE 1: Biobord Network Forum

The purpose of the Biobord Network discussion area is to be a channel for the internal communication within the network. First of all, the discussion area is a place to find information on the network management, communication, and co-working. The partners are able to locate, for example, Biobord communication resources, and the official network management documents in the discussion area. There is also a dedicated sub-category for the meetings and materials of the Biobord Board.

Secondly, the closed discussion areas offers a platform for planning network activities and connecting with other partners. The partners can join discussions on arising project ideas and network initiatives as well as share their own ideas on new projects, events or other activities. At the 'Biobord Network', the partners can find network partners with shared interests, team-up, and elaborate the ideas further.

Partner tips!

It is important that the Network Partners use and follow the Biobord Network forum, and we recommend you to select this forum category as 'watched' in your notifications (under My preferences).

The co-working of Biobord Board, the related discussions and meeting materials can be located from a subcategory 'Biobord Board' <https://forum.biobord.eu/c/biobordnetwork/biobordboard/>.

We also recommend you to check from https://forum.biobord.eu/g/Biobord_network to confirm that all relevant colleagues from your organization have joined the group. User rights to the Biobord Network Forum can be requested by contacting the Administrator or by sending a 'Request to join' at the Groups page.

3. OPEN FORUM OF BIOBORD

Open Forum of Biobord consists of **Biobord User Support**, **Biobord Open Forum** and **Biobord On Stage**. First category, Biobord User Support, offers guidance for all Biobord users in form of user guides, tutorials, and user tips. In addition, users can present their questions to administrators in this discussion area.

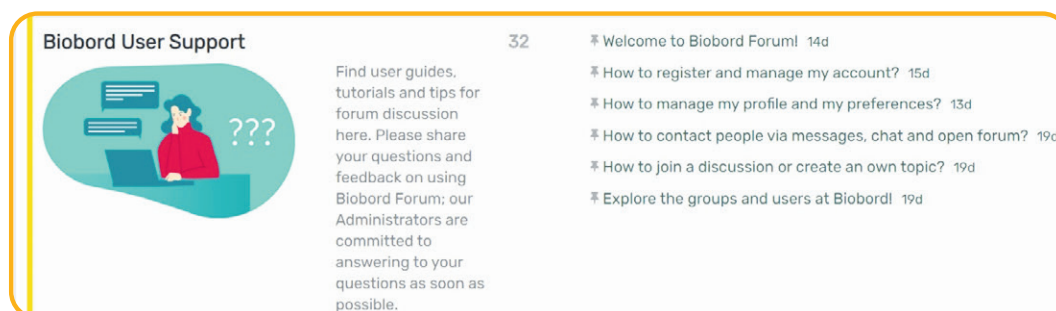


Figure 2: Biobord User Support

Second of the Forum categories, Biobord Open Forum, is an open networking and matchmaking area for all registered Biobord users. As defined here, the Network Partners play an important bridge builder role in this category. Finally, Biobord On Stage offers the Network Partners a chance to share their open international online events as well as to organise open web-events for the Biobord Network.

Biobord Open Forum

Open Biobord Forum is a networking, matchmaking, and teambuilding area for bioeconomy developers to find new opportunities, expertise and partners. The purpose has been defined in more details in the [About topic of the Open Biobord Forum](#). In the 'Open Biobord Forum', all users can announce calls for expertise or calls for partners. A call for expertise can help a user to find support to take their business ideas further or to test their ideas. With a call for partners, a user can team-up with relevant expertise to respond to a funding opportunity.

Furthermore, a user can announce a call for solution to find solutions for their bioeconomy business or research challenge. Finally, users are also welcomed to market their own expertise and services in Open Biobord Forum. They can, for example, introduce themselves at <https://forum.biobord.eu/t/meet-the-network-and-introduce-yourself/>.

The discussion in this area is only in English. All users should note that the discussion in this category is publicly visible to anyone entering the Forum, although only registered users will be able to join the discussion.

Partner tips! When posting your topics, remember to use the relevant tags: call-for-partner, call-for-expertise, and call-for-solution.

To get information of new calls, you can follow the tags used in Open Biobord Forum, or the whole category, by setting the tags or category as 'watched' in your notifications (under My Preferences).

Biobord Contact Points

Biobord network partners play an important bridge builder role in the Open Biobord Forum by working as Contact Points between their regional networks and the Biobord users. The role of the Biobord Contact Points is to activate and facilitate the discussion at the Open Biobord Forum. Specific commitments have been agreed to guide the work of the Biobord Contact Points at the forum.

Commitments of the Biobord Contact Points

- ✓ All Biobord Contact Points monitor all new topics shared in the Open Biobord Forum. This can be done by setting the category to 'watched' under notifications.

Welcoming newcomers and assisting users

- ✓ When a registered user from their region or country introduces themselves at the Open Biobord Forum, the Biobord Contact Point will contact them with a private message to offer help in using the Biobord platform (guidance to user support) and getting connected with the network partners.
- ✓ When a registered user from their region or country posts a topic at the Open Biobord Forum, the Biobord Contact Point will react as a reply and share the message with relevant contacts from the Biobord network.

Building trust and interaction in the forum community

- ✓ Biobord Contact Points introduce themselves in the 'Open Biobord Forum' under 'Get connected via Biobord Contact Points' topic <https://forum.biobord.eu/t/get-connected-via-biobord-contact-points/>.
- ✓ Biobord Contact Points update their profile with profile picture and 'About me' description.
- ✓ Biobord Contact Points set an example for users with active use of the forum and by applying different functionalities properly (e.g., tags, categories, text editing).

Participation in the forum development

- ✓ Biobord Contact Points share feedback from users with administrators to help forum development.

Participation in the Biobord marketing

- ✓ Biobord Contact Points share information about Biobord network activities in their organization and networks.

The partners name representatives from their region as Biobord Contact Points. If a region is represented by several partner organizations, the partners can name joint representative(s). However, it is important to have at least one active Contact Point from each region to connect users of the Open Biobord Forum with relevant contacts of the partner region.

A timely list of the Biobord Contact Points is kept at <https://forum.biobord.eu/t/get-connected-via-biobord-contact-points/>. Partners are responsible for making sure this information is up-to-date as per the network agreement.

Biobord On Stage

Biobord On Stage is a category to share information about the open online events of Biobord Network partners. The events are announced in this discussion area by the partners that are hosting the events. Events are open for anyone to join (unless otherwise instructed by the partners). After the event, the materials are shared and discussion on outcomes may continue under the event topic.

Biobord Network Partners can use the 'On Stage' concept to market their online events to the Biobord Network. Organizing an 'On Stage' event is also recommended for presenting a new joint project idea or initiative to the Biobord Network.

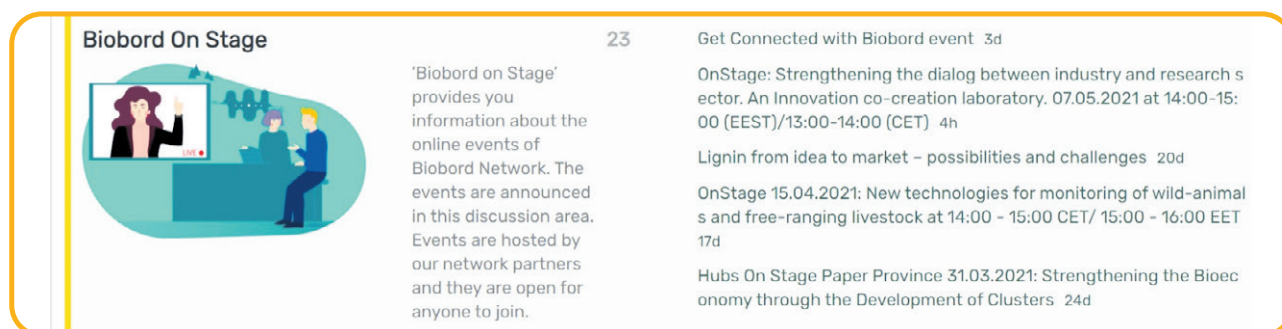


Figure 4: Biobord On Stage

Checklist for organizing an 'On Stage' event

- ✓ When booking the time, check that the calendar is free <https://forum.biobord.eu/c/on-stage/30/1/calendar> and if you need to use the Zoom room of Biobord, confirm with the Biobord Network Secretary.
- ✓ Announce at least 2 weeks prior to the event with a topic at 'Biobord On Stage'. Add a 'Event' to your topic to have the event featured in the calendar of the On Stage category. Use relevant tags and tag also relevant Biobord users that you know may be interested in your topic. Please study [What are tags and how to use them?](#) if you need further information.
- ✓ Inform the Biobord Network Secretary to get your event shared on Biobord social media.
- ✓ Market the event in your own channels (e.g., social media) if you wish for a wider audience.
- ✓ Share material and information before the event if you wish to get feedback on your idea from the participants. You can edit the topic to include documents, pictures, embedded videos, links to recordings etc. Please study [How to join the discussion or create an own topic?](#) if you need further information.
- ✓ Advise the participants on how to continue the discussion after the event. For example, if you are planning a joint project, should the interested partners carry on the discussion under the topic in the open forum – or move to more private channels.
- ✓ Share the results of your open event. You can share outcomes and material as a reply to your event topic. Also, if you had a particularly successful event, why not make a news item about it to Biobord.

4. PARTNER FORUMS AT THE BIOBORD FORUM

At the forum, all Biobord Network Partners have a right to open and facilitate categories and groups dedicated to the planning or implementation of the Joint Agendas of the Biobord Network. In addition, the Biobord Network Partners have a right to open and facilitate categories and groups for other bioeconomy related networks and projects. Biobord administrators will help partners setting up these categories and groups as well as offer user support for the users of these categories and groups.

The process of building and managing a Partner Forum has been outlined as a three-step process that aims for continuous improvement with an iterative approach. The recommended conducts for the management of the forum category have been defined based on the experiences and identified best practices of Discourse, a forum hosting company with experience of over 1500 customers.

Partner tip! Read more of the best practices in Forum hosting from Discourse's Starter Kit available online at <https://blog.discourse.org/2021/03/discourse-essentials-starter-kit/>

The partners that wish to operate 'Partner Forums' at the Biobord forum are committed to following the established joint process for definition, facilitation, and activation as well as evaluation and improvement of the forum activities. The partners will name a facilitator or group of facilitators for the established closed group or open community. The facilitator will define the forum category activities as advised in this guide. The information on the needed category and connected group(s) is provided for the Biobord administrators via the helpdesk ticketing system.

When operational, the facilitator has the responsibility to activate, manage, and monitor the activities of the open community or closed group. The monitoring responsibility includes addressing any inappropriate or illegal behaviour. Facilitator is also requested to aim for continuous improvement with a process of self-assessment. In the closed 'Biobord Network' discussion area, the facilitators are invited to engage in peer learning and co-working to share information on best practices, to plan the forum activation, marketing, and communication as well as to give feedback and analyze the progress of the platform.

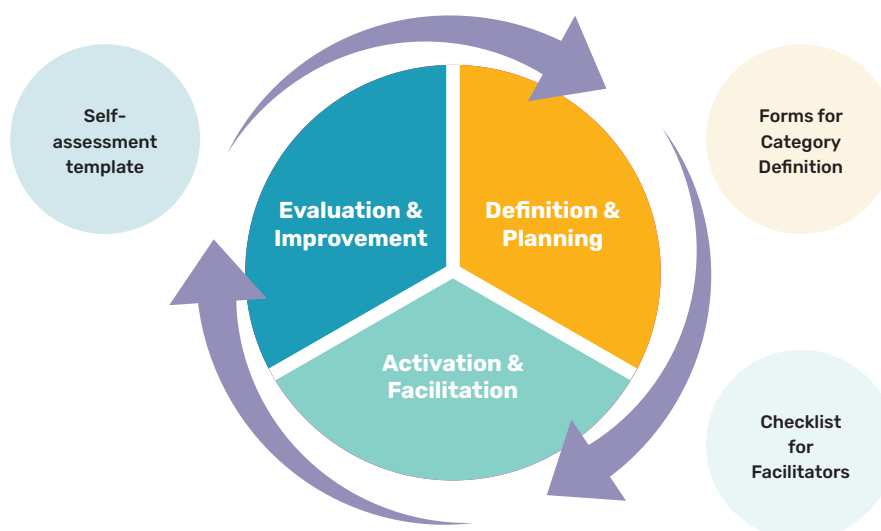


FIGURE 5. Process of building and managing a forum community (Aalto, 2019)

Defining a Forum Category

A Forum category needs to be active to function, so the best approach is to build the categories based on need. Start a category when you have a targeted user group in mind with a need for active dialogue or team working.

Why? The definition of a category is important for ensuring that the category is build based on a need and that there is a potential for growing a committed community of followers and participants for the category. Furthermore, it is important to establish the basic rules and conducts of the interaction at the category.

Who? A facilitator is named for each forum category as a responsible person for establishing the rules and conducts for the activities in the category and as an animator and coordinator of the activities.

How? The facilitator is requested to fill a ticket in the Helpdesk of Biobord to submit a category request to the administrator staff. The data in the ticket is needed to enable the technical development and to have adequate information for users on the rules and conducts. The content of the ticket is presented here in table 1.

TABLE 1	Mandatory information	Optional information
Open Community at the Forum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Category name • Placement (parent category, if relevant) • Launch date • 'About the Category' topic • Responsible member 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Colours (Hex Code #RRGGBB) and images used in visual outlook of the category • Enabling of events, calendar and map in the category • Establishing a group connected to open community • Tags used in the category • Resource cabinet in Document Management System • IPR management approach defined as part of the 'About the category'
Closed group at the Forum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Category name • Placement (parent category, if relevant) • Launch date • 'About the Category' topic • List of members to the closed group 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Colours (Hex Code #RRGGBB) and images used in visual outlook of the category • Enabling of events, calendar and map in the category • Tags used in the category • Resource cabinet in Document Management System • IPR management approach defined as part of the 'About the category'

Helpdesk Ticket

The helpdesk contains two ticket options relevant for building an open community or closed group at the Forum. First option is 'request a new category' and second option is 'request a change in category'. For a request of a new category, please fill in all mandatory information carefully and consider also the optional information (Table 1). If you need to make a change to the existing category, please use the ticket 'request a change in category'.

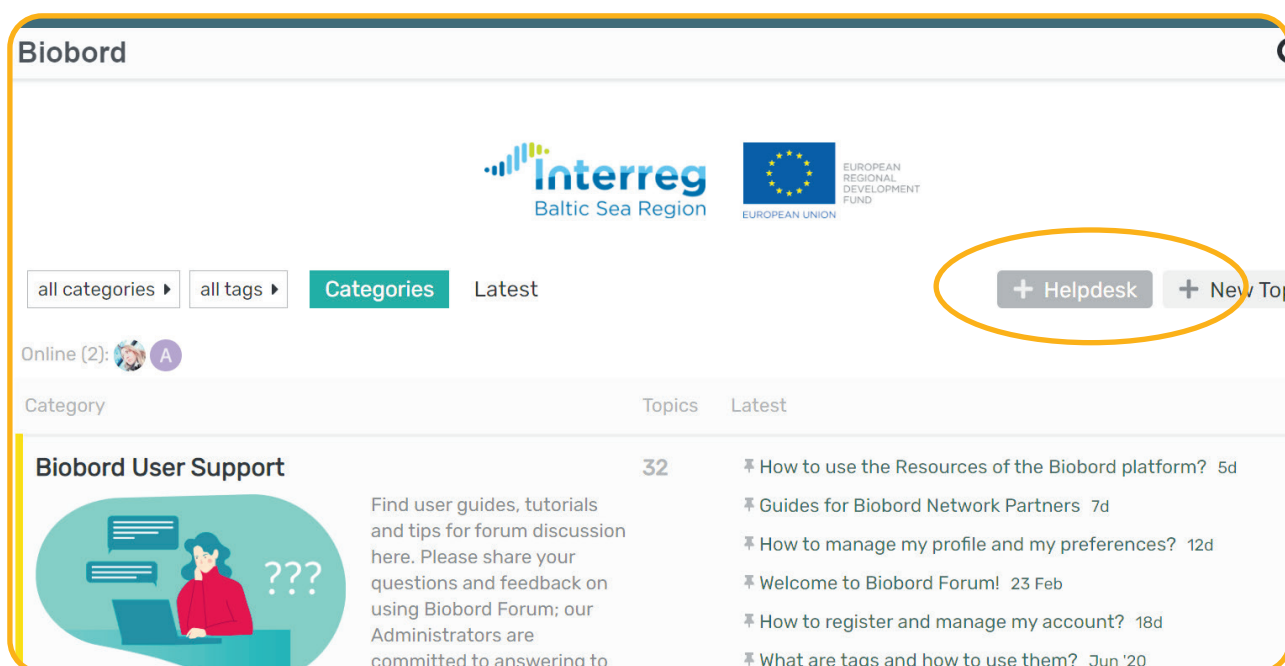


FIGURE 6. Helpdesk access

Checklist for Forum Facilitators Before Launching

- ✓ Clearly define your community's purpose. Pay attention to the 'About this category' topic.
- ✓ Seed the discussion with interesting topics.
- ✓ Commit to visiting and participating regularly.
- ✓ Link your community everywhere and promote it so people can find it.

In the following chapters, we will give you practical steps to complete these 4 tasks.

Steps to Clearly Define Your Community's Purpose

Every category has an initial **"About this category"** topic as an open description as an introduction to the category. It should answer the questions:

- ✓ What is the purpose of this category?
- ✓ What is happening at this category? What can I do here?
- ✓ Who is this category meant for? Who are in the user group or target group?
- ✓ Who is facilitating or organizing the activities at the category?
- ✓ Where can I ask for more information?

This is the topic where the forum facilitator should provide a simple answer to the question **'what is this place?'**. The description provided there will guide the users on what to expect and how to conduct themselves at the category. If the users are not sure of the purpose of the discussion area, they are most likely not going to participate. The facilitator needs to make sure to give your new category a good, clear description, so people understand what belongs there. Keep the description simple; easy to approach and understand. Make sure your audience feels welcome to join in.

With the 'About this category' description and clear examples, you can guide the user in the use of the discussion area. Use the definition given in 'About this category' consistently in your communication about the category. The message can be e.g., linked to your website with an access link to the forum category.

Tips to Facilitators!

You can request an administrator to pin certain topics on top of your category, so that they will always remain visible to users of your category.

If a need arises, you can request an administrator to **create sub-categories under your main category**. These categories should also have their description as a 'About this category' topic. However, do not create too many initial categories, as you can overwhelm your audience. You can always add more categories, and easily categorize topics later. It is better to figure out the organization as you go rather than assuming you will get it all right from the beginning.

As a part of defining the rules and conducts, the facilitator is also encouraged to define the approach to intellectual property rights in case the category involves sharing or collaborative development of materials and resources. The use of Creative Commons approaches is recommended for the open categories and are applicable for many closed groups (Table 2). However, the closed groups can also require a stricter IPR contract, which can be defined by the facilitator as needed.

TABLE 2 Creative Commons licence Attribution (by)	Description All CC licenses require that others who use your work in any way must give you credit the way you request, but not in a way that suggests you endorse them or their use. If they want to use your work without giving you credit or for endorsement purposes, they must get your permission first.
ShareAlike (sa)	You let others copy, distribute, display, perform, and modify your work, as long as they distribute any modified work on the same terms. If they want to distribute modified works under other terms, they must get your permission first.
NonCommercial (nc)	You let others copy, distribute, display, perform, and (unless you have chosen NoDerivatives) modify and use your work for any purpose other than commercially unless they get your permission first.
NoDerivatives (nd)	You let others copy, distribute, display and perform only original copies of your work. If they want to modify your work, they must get your permission first.

Steps to seed the discussion with interesting topics

Your next order of business is to seed your site with interesting topics and replies. The worst thing you can do is open with a blank site. The initial topics are critical:

- ☒ To further explain what your community is. What topics you see on the front page right now?
These are the kinds of conversations that happen here. This is what we tend to generally talk about.
This is what our community is.
- ☒ To provide examples of the sort of content you want. To let everyone know that yes, topics like these are welcome on our site. Create more discussions like these!
- ☒ To invite participation. Have some 'getting to know you' topics for people to share about themselves, and some topics that are open ended and encourage replying with opinions, stories, or pictures.
- ☒ Recruit friends, recruit colleagues, recruit power users, do whatever it takes to build out an initial solid base of content. Send out invites! You cannot launch your community without it.

Initiate Conversation!

- ✓ Have some open-ended 'getting to know you' topics for people to share their opinions, experiences, stories, or pictures. An 'introduce yourself' topic is always fun, and you should go first!
- ✓ Generously like any and every post you enjoy! What type of content gets liked is a major part of your community's culture. Set an example by frequently liking posts. Seeing liked posts also encourages people to reciprocate in kind and come back for more.
- ✓ Are there common themes that tend to come up again and again with a specific group?
Try moving those discussions out of private email silos into your public (or private) discussion area.
- ✓ If you find an interesting article on the web you want to discuss, quickly start a new topic by pasting a link into the topic title. Try it!
- ✓ Where have you seen interesting, thoughtful discussions recently? Can you bring the spirit of those discussions to your site? Set an example and act how you wish the others would act on the forum.
- ✓ Invite friends or co-workers to post example topics and reply to them so visitors can browse the existing conversations to discover what your community is about.

Steps to Start with Yourself

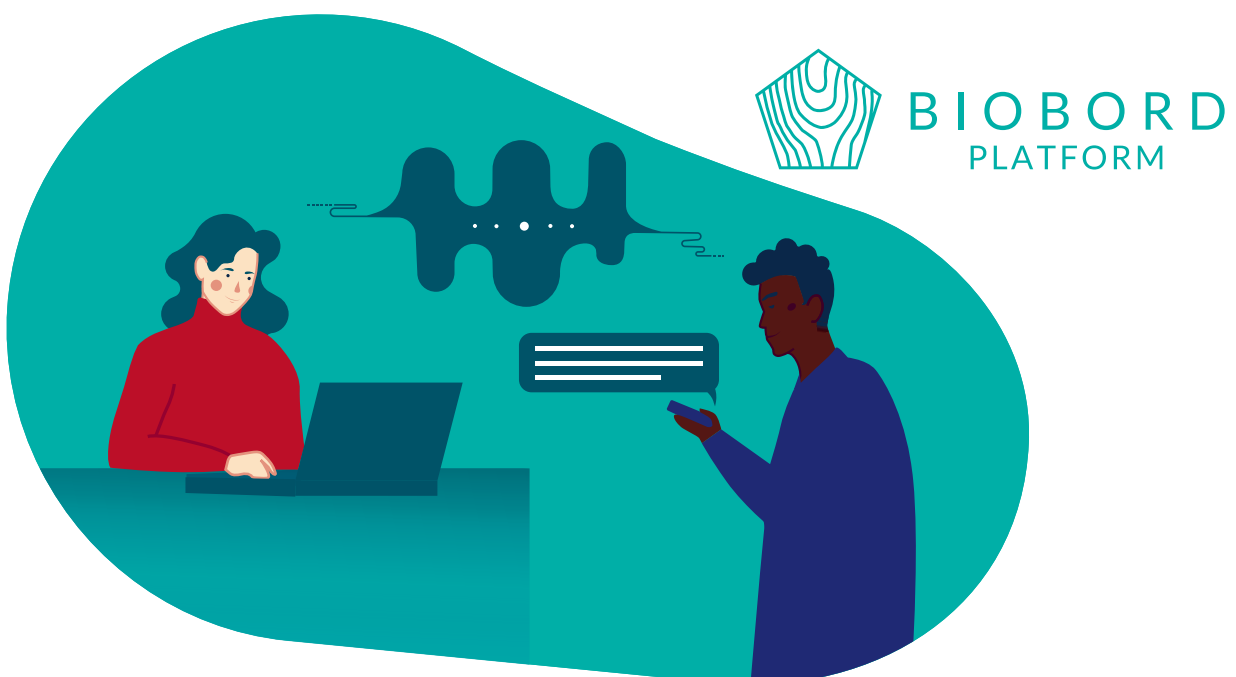
- ✓ **Leadership comes from the top.** The presence of staff speaks volumes about whether your community is alive and thriving. Do not just say you believe in this community; demonstrate that through your personal participation and enthusiasm. Lead by example. Reply to questions people have, help your community learn the ropes, gently guide and shape the community as you go.
- ✓ **Half of any community is showing up regularly.** There is no substitute for simply being there, each day, every day. Welcome and respond to new users as they arrive. Listen to their feedback. Encourage everyone else to do the same over a period of months and soon you will have a core of regulars that form the heart of your community – maybe even a few members so engaged they could eventually become community moderators.
- ✓ **Be patient.** Building communities is hard. It takes months if not years. No software alone can guarantee the success of a community. However, you can! Integrate your community into your organizations and hubs daily activities – and your community will be off to a solid start.

Steps to Link your community everywhere and promote it

- ✓ Start by linking the Forum everywhere:
 - **To your website**
 - **In newsletters, email, blog...**
 - **On Twitter, Facebook, and other social media**
- ✓ Think where you can place links to your community so that people (and web search engines) will naturally discover it.
- ✓ Have some special launch fanfare when your community opens. This will drive an initial rush of new community members, some of whom will stick around and seed early growth. Consider offering small rewards or benefits for people who sign up and become active users.

Tip to Facilitators!

Send personal invitations to your staff, power users, or friends, to log in early and reply to your initial topics to generate activity. Send one-click email invites via your Discourse invite page (it is on your user profile page). You can also send bulk invites to many email addresses at once.



FACILITATION OF A FORUM COMMUNITY OR GROUP

The facilitators play a key role in the success of the forum category both in open community building and in co-working in closed groups. The facilitation is at best a team effort, and as such, it is important to establish a joint code of conduct for the activation, facilitation and communication of the forum activities for your facilitator team. Even if you are managing the forum category alone, it is still important to set yourself targets and plan for the forum management. A checklist for forum facilitator can work as a tool for the facilitators to plan, operate and evaluate their activities as facilitators.

Good Practices of Facilitation

Group facilitation is an important factor determining the success of the co-working in the forum. Good facilitation can help a team achieve their goals in the most effective and constructive manner. The facilitation of co-working should address at least the following aspects to create fruitful co-working premises for the team:

- ✓ Ensure the expected outcome/s or objectives are clear
- ✓ Establish what the expectations of the participants are concerning the working methods and results
- ✓ Energise and manage participation with suitable group working methods and roles for participants
- ✓ Recognise and reinforce supportive behaviours and responses. Establish and build trust with honest and transparent communication culture as well as team building exercises
- ✓ Evaluate success either by using individual or group feedback, to review and draw out responsibility for the action points

Five simple ways to strengthen trust and interaction in forum co-working

1. **Update your user profile.** Use a photo, background photo and introduce yourself.
2. Post your topics as **first-person accounts**. Tell the information from your personal perspective and include your personal reflections. Emoticons, videos and photos can help as well.
3. Do not simply attach a document. Try to **summarise the main points and the needed actions as text**, so that the reader can react to your topic without opening the attachment.
4. Involve **an action message** in your topic. Ask for a specific feedback or include a question, poll or vote.
5. **Respond and react to the topics posted by others.** If nothing else, like the topic and let them know you read their text.

Commitments of Forum Facilitator

To plan the management and activation of the forum category, a facilitator is advised to make a commitment statement that works as a checklist to guide the facilitator's work. As every forum category and group has different focus and scope, the commitments can vary notably from one group to another. An open forum will have to pay more attention to marketing and welcoming of new community members, while a closed group should establish clear co-working principles and communication responsibilities to guide the activities.

The checklist presented here provides examples of different levels of commitments for planning the interaction with the community of the forum category. It also provides choices for planning the ways to initiate and encourage discussion in the forum, as well as examples for planning the marketing and communication actions. Make a commitment statement before starting the forum community to guide you and your team in conducting the activities at your Forum category. Adjust the list and add your own commitments were needed.



Make Your Own Facilitators' Checklist

Our organization or team will commit to the following practices to build trust and interaction in the Forum community.

Inviting the user group to join

- ✓ Engaging (potential) user group directly with personal invitation
- ✓ Engaging (potential) user group directly with a face-to-face event to support launch
- ✓ Directing a user group from another communication channel or platform to Biobord

Welcoming newcomers

- ✓ Send a greeting message to all new registered users from our region
- ✓ Send a greeting message to all new registered users discussing in our category
- ✓ Like all posts from new users and reply to them to welcome newcomers to join the discussion

Initiating discussion

- ✓ Starting discussion with open-ended 'getting to know you' topics for people to share their opinions, experiences, stories, or pictures, e.g. an "introduce yourself" topic.
- ✓ Moving discussions from private email silos to the forum area.
- ✓ Share interesting articles or videos from the web as new topics to start discussions.
- ✓ Seeding the discussion with interesting topics before and during the launch of the category

Building trust and interaction

- ✓ Update your user profile. Use a photo, background photo and introduce yourself.
- ✓ Post your topics as first person accounts. Tell the information from your personal perspective and include your personal reflections.

- ✓ Do not simply attach a document or a link, but summarise the content for the reader
- ✓ Involve an action message in your topics (what you would like the reader to do)
- ✓ Respond and react to the topics posted by others. Like the topic and let them know you read their text.

Having a quick response time

- ✓ Responding to any post in my category within 1 working day
- ✓ Responding to any posts in my category within 3 working days
- ✓ Responding to any posts in my category within 5 working days

Leading the discussion

- ✓ Making 3-5 topics weekly
- ✓ Making a new topic at least weekly

Monitoring the discussion

- ✓ Informing Biobord administrators of the inappropriate or suspicious posts and replies
- ✓ Moderating the posts with direct messages to the users exhibiting inappropriate behaviour

Replacing other communication channels in communication related to the category purpose

- ✓ Replacing or minimizing use of email in favour of Biobord
- ✓ Replacing or minimizing the use of internal communication platforms in favour of Biobord
- ✓ Replacing or minimizing the use of external communication platforms in favour of Biobord

Planning and implementing a team building approach for the forum community

- ✓ Keeping the description of the category updated ('About the category' text)

- ✓ Identifying and utilizing a strategy for team-building in online meetings
- ✓ Identifying and utilizing supporting programmes and tools where needed
- ✓ Identifying and utilizing an IPR management approach and communicating it clearly to users

Communication and promotion of the Forum community

- ✓ Linking the Forum category via our organization's website landing page (preferably icon, banner or main navigation)
- ✓ Linking the Forum category via our organization's newsletters, blogs etc.
- ✓ Linking the Forum category via our organization's email signature
- ✓ Linking the Forum category via our Twitter, Facebook, and other social media
- ✓ Linking via our partner's communication channels
- ✓ Organizing a social media campaign to support the launch
- ✓ Organizing a reward system for active users, or newcomers
- ✓ Organizing promotional events or training workshops for potential user groups

Involvement of organisation

- ✓ All our members will register as users as Biobord will be an official communication platform.
- ✓ All members are encouraged to register as users to engage with external stakeholders and target groups.
- ✓ Only specific team will be using the Biobord platform to carry out the activities related to management and facilitation of the forum category.

SELF-ASSESSMENT PROCESS

The process for self-evaluation of the community building and management is outlined as a three-step process. The aim of the process is to encourage continuous improvement. It is recommended that the evaluation cycle would be quite short (2-3 months) in the beginning of the forum community building. At a more established stage, the evaluation cycle can grow longer up to 6-12 months.

