

Community Building In Indoor Climbing Gyms: Part 1

January 5, 2024

in [CWA Blog](#)



One of the paramount functions of an indoor climbing gym is to provide a space for people to climb. But as we know, climbing gyms offer much more than surfaces to climb on.

People come to climbing gyms for many different reasons and they provide an invaluable social hub for the climbing community as well as the broader local community. Understanding this and leveraging it through community-building events can have many positive outcomes for the climbing gym, its members, and the community.

Article At A Glance

- **Writer:** The [Headwall Group](#), who run private consulting in the indoor climbing industry and have written for the CWA for years. They're also frequently presenters at the [CWA Summit](#).
- **Who Should Read:** This article is for management, programmers, and gym owners.
- **What Will You Learn:** How to identify your why, who, and how of community-building events for indoor climbing gyms.
- **Tie-Ins, Resources, or Further Reading:** Come see The Headwall Group speak at the CWA Summit in Portland! Registrations are still being accepted for their pre-conference session, "[Experiential Approach to Climbing Programs](#)"

Investing in events that build community by bringing people together can benefit your gym and

elevate your business in the ecosystem of your market. These events are a valuable way to lean into your mission, highlight your brand, mobilize and inspire your employees, and engage and activate potential new customers and members.

In this series of articles, we will be investigating various ways climbing gyms can focus on community-building through climbing and non-climbing-related community events.

Discovering the Why

At Headwall, we are adamant that it's not worth doing something unless you know WHY you are doing it. So, let's start there.

We invite you to explore the following benefits, both tangible and intangible, for creating programming specifically for community-building. While these are all great reasons, they don't have to be YOUR reasons. The first step in organizing a worthwhile community-building event is identifying why you are doing it and what value you hope it creates. Let's look at some potential positive outcomes of quality community-building events.

Be Known For Leadership

Inviting other folks in the climbing, outdoor, and fitness community in your market to celebrate connections can make clear your role as a thought leader and connector in your community. When you expand your reach through events that invite the community to participate, you have an opportunity to tell the story of your brand. Every gym is something more than a place to climb. It is a story, a name, and an identity. These events are a perfect venue to develop this brand and expand the story to show how you are a leader in your community.

Build Cohesion on Your Team

Your employees can be motivated and mobilized by their role in these fun events and it can build employee cohesion and contribute to your culture. Research from the human resources field demonstrates that community engagement is one of the chief drivers of employee morale and engagement.

However, less than one-tenth of all companies engage in it. By demonstrating your commitment to your community through events, you will bolster employee buy-in and morale. This same research shows that employees get the most out of helping develop events and community-facing programs. So, put together a team to spend some time developing events and you will likely see these employees run with the task.

Community Events Are Membership Tools

Community-building events are a way to invite new customers into your gym and potentially convert them into members or community cheerleaders. Rather than just depending on our repeat customers or members, new types of community-facing events not only attract new customers, but they expand your reach to the social networks attached to these new visitors and advocates. This expanding community of support builds brand recognition and infuses new

ideas and energy into your business.

Build Buy-In From Your Everyday Members

These events are a low-stakes way for folks who may be new to climbing to become comfortable with your space. The opportunity for experiential interaction with your facility and brand in ways that are comfortable to them and create the comfort to try new things.

Are you launching new fitness or yoga classes? New learn to climb or training offerings? Advertise them at an event and provide an experiential demonstration of what they look like and watch them fill up.

Built-In Marketing

Non-climbing events have the potential - if executed thoughtfully - to generate quite a buzz around your business, invite in new customers, and create a great opportunity for marketing down the road.

The marketing assets that you can capture, ideas that can be generated, and demonstration of community values all can live for much longer than the evening it takes to put on an event.

Who is Your Event For?

Every gym has various target audiences it can direct its community-building efforts. Some key audiences we might focus on include our core membership, families or guardians of young climbers, members of the broader climbing or outdoor sports community, and friends of friends. Ideally, we find a way to engage the communities we are already familiar with and the ones we are not yet reaching.

READ ALSO: [Make Your Gym a Community Partner](#)

Deciding which audience(s) you want to reach will help you as you start to think about what type of event you want to host. For example, if you know you are trying to engage complete newcomers to the sport, you would not want to host an event that requires an intermediate level of climbing ability to participate. Or, if you want to engage families of your youth program's participants, you would want to consider an event that includes activities that appeal to both adults and children. Knowing your audience gives you a jumping-off point for creating an appealing event.

How Do I Start?

Once you have decided why you want to host a community-building event and who it is for, the next step is to engage members, visitors, and your market to understand their needs and

desires. Some examples of ways to approach this might be by creating an online member survey, having your front desk staff ask a question and recording the answers, or tabling at community events and soliciting feedback from non-members about what kinds of events would draw them in. (A great way to incentivize folks to answer questions is to offer a small prize drawing for those who give answers). Then, this feedback can be used to begin building a calendar of events.

As you begin to think about how to design and plan a community-building event, consider these trends that we have noted from the gyms that we have worked with:

- Focus on non-climbing programs. These programs allow us to build a bigger boat and invite new constituents in.
- Make sure the event is mission-aligned. Your community-building programs should support your role in your community and the mission of your organization.
- Make it fun. Your community-building programs need to be enjoyable, creative, and something your members will be talking about for years to come.

At Headwall we are excited about this topic and would love to hear from you if you have success stories or have experienced challenges related to organizing community-building events.

In our next articles in this series, we will dig deeper into designing community-building events and exploring ideas for building your fanbase through events, targeting various audiences.

Come See the Headwall Group at the 2024 CWA Summit

Take advantage of the Headwall Group's amazing arsenal of information by attending their pre-conference session at the 2024 CWA Summit. They're taking attendees through the experiential style of building programs for your members.

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.



THE FUTURE OF AUTO-BELAYS?

January 15, 2024

UNDERSTANDING KIDS WITH DISABILITIES IN CLIMBING



January 5, 2024