

SENSE OF COMMUNITY AT GLACIER NATIONAL PARK

Interactive Qualifying Project Report



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Abstract

The project assesses the sense of community at Glacier National Park (GNP) and provides recommendations to strengthen it. Sense of community emerges from employee perception determined by interviews and surveys. There are five different sub-communities with different senses of community. Some communities are stronger than others. This outcome appears to be a function of community remoteness and relatively small size. Employees reported both problems and solutions. These problems and solutions led to the project's six recommendations to help strengthen the Park community: create consistent training for Employee Leads, transition online meetings and training to in-person, host more frequent events, increase advertisement of events, create an informal communal space, and guarantee adequate housing.

Executive Summary

The goal of this project was to assess the sense of community at Glacier National Park (GNP) and provide suggestions to strengthen it. This assessment was completed by gathering employee perceptions at each of the different hubs in GNP: Many Glacier, Polebridge, St. Mary, Two Medicine, and West Glacier. A Park-wide sense of community was also assessed.

Through this project, we found that there was no sense of Park-wide community. Most employees deemed that having a sense of community within their own hub was adequate. Therefore we provided recommendations that will help improve the sense of community within the hubs, and hopefully the entire Park in the years to come. These six recommendations are: create a consistent training for Employee Lead positions, return meetings to an in-person format, increase advertisement of events to spur participation, provide an informal communal space for employees to gather, and guarantee adequate housing for employees.

Over the course of this project, three initiatives were determined in order to reach our project's goal. These initiatives were:

1. Gather employee perceptions of community within the Park
2. Analyze responses to determine weaknesses and strengths in community
3. Develop suggestions and action items for the Park

Together, these initiatives were completed using a variety of methods.

To gather employee perceptions of community within the Park, we used stratified and snowball sampling, semi-structured interviews, and surveys. Stratified and snowball sampling were used to identify interview subjects in this study. Semi-structured interviews and surveys allowed us to gather perceptions from a variety of employees all across the Park.

When analyzing responses to determine weaknesses and strengths in the community, we used content analysis. This allowed us to review all of the employee responses and generate descriptive categories and themes. Descriptive categories and themes helped us sort and quantify the main ideas from all employee responses.

To develop suggestions and action items for the Park, we used Osborn's brainstorming and the starbursting method. Osborn's brainstorming allowed us to take the main ideas and form key findings. The starbursting method allowed us to take the key findings and develop suggestions.

Working and living at GNP can be challenging considering the large number of visitors and high turnover of staff. One way the Park can keep employees happy is by providing a good sense of community.

Authorship

Each team member, Katie Buek, Livi Hernon, Liam Hoyle, and Nico Panzardi, have contributed equally. All have written and edited this report.

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1.0 Introduction

Glacier National Park (GNP) has over 500 permanent and seasonal employees during the peak season. These employees exert themselves to properly manage visitors while protecting Park resources. 82% of these employees have seasonal jobs, they are removed from their normal community. This makes employee retention a challenge in the Park. One way to improve employee retention is to strengthen the sense of community. To the employees at GNP, community pertains to the area where they live and work.

Because the sense of community varies within GNP, the goal of this project was to assess the sense of community and provide suggestions to strengthen it. To achieve this goal, we used employee perceptions on the current sense of community. We then determined where weaknesses and strengths existed. Published literature and employee suggestions on how to strengthen a community were examined. Doing so allowed us to provide future action items and solutions to improve the community in the Park.

GNP is split into five main living and working environments. These areas are called hubs. They are Many Glacier, Polebridge, St. Mary, Two Medicine, and West Glacier. Within these hubs, certain characteristics define the sense of community. The characteristics are wellbeing, common ties, geographical location, and size.

Wellbeing relates to physical and emotional needs being met in a community (Aruma & Hanachor, 2017). This allows members of a community to form common ties (Wellman & Wortley, 1990). Common ties include a shared sense of culture, values, and experiences. They allow the members to have a sense of inclusion and understanding with each other (University of Kansas, n.d.). One thing that enables common ties is geography. Geographic location allows for the sharing of common ties and distinction between different communities (Poland & Maré, 2005) Different communities come in various sizes. For small communities, regular traditions and communications are easier to maintain. Larger communities provide fewer opportunities for people to connect (Dunbar & Sosis, 2018). The residents of larger communities do not have the same sense of responsibility that small communities have to help each other out. This makes shared problems harder to solve and a sense of community harder to maintain (Dunbar & Sosis, 2018).

When a community's characteristics are understood, it may be easier to address them. Community promotion is often successful when there are improved supervisor relations, social events, social media involvement, and progression of time. These aspects play a role within working communities, living communities, and both.

Considered one at a time, supervisors set the tone of effective communication within the workplace. Good communication positively impacts community engagement (Mikkelsen et al., 2017). Regularly scheduled social events outside of work can bring people together, turning co-workers into friends (Porath, 2022). The advertisement of events through social media can supplement supervisor communication, increasing involvement (Wellmen et al., 2016). The progression of time allows for more social connections to be made and improved, both in and out of work (Bowles, 2009).

Community characterization and its promotion, along with the previously discussed characteristics and aspects, were the focus of this project. These were identified, collected, and analyzed by the team through interviews, surveys, and the review of relevant literature. This allowed for the assessment of the sense of community at the Park and the ability to provide suggestions to strengthen it.

2.0 Background

The background chapter explains the information required to assess the sense of community at Glacier National Park and provide suggestions to strengthen it. A community is made up of people who have shared characteristics or interests (Yin et al., 2016). This study will focus on those who share workplace and living communities. The sense of community can be characterized by wellbeing, common ties, geographical location, and size. The factors used to strengthen community are supervisor relations, social events, social media involvement, and progression of time.

2.1 Characterizing the Sense of Community

We will characterize the sense of community in three ways: wellbeing, common ties, geographical location, and size.

2.1.1 Wellbeing

Wellbeing requires physical and emotional needs to be met. These needs are: physiological, safety, social, esteem, self-actualization, understanding, and aesthetic (Aruma & Hanachor, 2017). Maslow explores these seven levels of needs in his theory of individual wellbeing. (Maslow, 1943). The theory emphasizes that certain needs must be met before others can be achieved. For example, food and shelter must be present for love and belonging to occur (Aruma & Hanachor, 2017). Without having all needs met, an individual can still interact and share with others, but not to their full potential (Maslow, 1943). In the Park's case, shelter is housing. Without this need met, employees won't be able to reach a strong sense of belonging i.e. community. For the community in the Park, Maslow's theories can be applied to the concept of wellbeing.

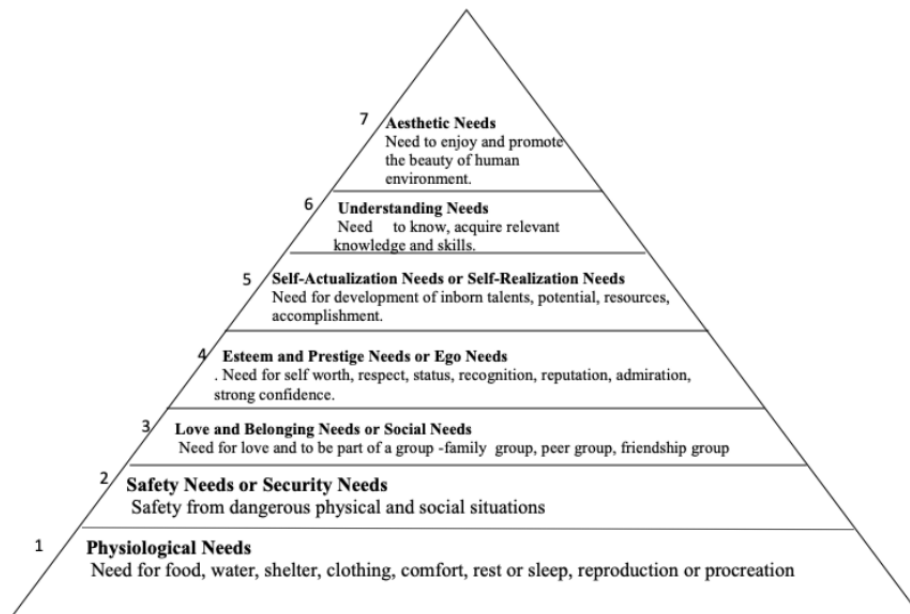


Figure 1. Maslow's Hierarchy of needs (Aruma & Hanachor, 2017)

Community Wellbeing (CWB) is different than individual wellbeing (Kim & Lee, 2014). CWB is the sum of individual wellbeing. When individual wellbeing is prioritized over CWB, it leads to conflict of interest among individuals (Kim & Lee, 2014). This is because actions that promote individual wellbeing can negatively impact CWB (Wiseman & Brasher, 2008). For instance, the Park could improve individual wellbeing by providing easier transportation for the workers. But with more vehicles on the road, CWB would suffer due to the loss of preservation, a shared value at GNP. Therefore, it is important to consider how individuals impact a community and the common ties that connect the people (Wiseman & Brasher, 2008).

2.1.2 Common Ties

Common ties are similarities that can bring people together. Every community has common ties or shared characteristics (Wellman & Wortley, 1990). The team explored the concept of common ties through culture, values, and experiences.

Culture

The culture of a community is defined by the demographics and rules that individuals share (University of Kansas, n.d.). The demographics includes age, gender, race, education, and much more. At GNP, the shared demographic is being a Park employee. Aside from being Park employees, they share the same rules working for the Federal Government.

These demographics and rules allow for an understanding of a community's culture. This understanding is important to determine what can be improved within itself (University of Kansas, n.d.). It further provides context for the behavior and attitudes of its members. In the case of the Park, the attitude of the employees may be work-oriented. That is, they view their work as more important than making friends. This would be because the shared demographic of being Park employees shaped the community culture. Shared culture is not the only common tie that characterizes community. How the community views itself, how it has changed over time, future projections, and shared values are also important for characterization (Bishop et al., 1997).

Values

People living and working with similar values are more likely to connect and foster relationships. These relationships increase the chance they feel welcome and promote an ideal community (Bishop et al., 1997). Feeling welcomed and included results in the development of psychological support networks (Tapia & Kvasny, 2004). In the Park, supporting one another through stressful or difficult times may strengthen the community. The Park community shares a set of values, such as preservation and stewardship, but they do not always share experiences.

Experiences

Sharing experiences is one way people create a bond. Those who experience mental or physical hardship display increased levels of empathy towards each other (Zaki, 2020). This helps facilitate a connection between individuals in a group (Cui et al 2021; Mobbs et al 2015). For example, individuals at the Park shared a hardship during the Covid-19 pandemic. A large percentage of interaction shifted from in-person to online (Venkatesh, 2020). This forced people to stay at home instead of interacting with their community. After the pandemic regulations end, the community may bond over their shared experiences of being isolated.

2.1.3 Geographical Location

A community is often defined by the location where the members live, work, and gather (University of Kansas, n.d.). The locations of communities are influenced by geographic features

and borders (National Geographic, 2018). The natural borders between communities have pros and cons. One benefit is the development of distinct values and culture (Poland & Maré, 2005). These traits bring about agreed solutions when problems are identified in the community (Poland & Maré, 2005). Negative impacts of geographical location involve the lack of interaction between different communities. This leads to misunderstandings and feelings of isolation (Poland & Maré, 2005).

Glacier National Park has five distinct geographic communities: Many Glacier, Polebridge, St. Mary, Two Medicine, and West Glacier. These employee hubs are separated by a great distance and natural borders, as shown in Figure 2. When hubs are physically separated it can restrict interaction between them. Aside from physical separation of hubs, some hubs are closer to towns than others. This can result in individuals commuting from other locations (S. Mandelko, Personal Communication, April 20, 2022). Commuting can separate their living and working communities. The separation can be problematic as individuals generally give priority to one or the other (Dunbar & Sosis, 2018).

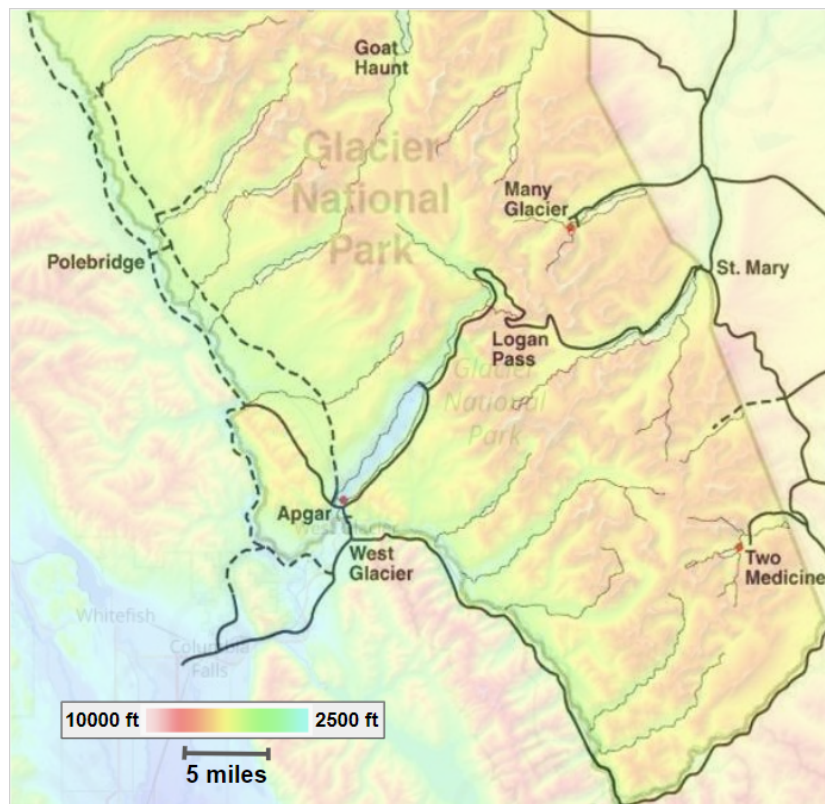


Figure 2. Illustration of the physical separation of each sub community within GNP with geographic features.

2.1.4 Size

Size is a major influence on the sense of community (Dunbar & Sosis, 2018). Natural borders and geographic features can affect a community's size (National Geographic, 2018). With larger communities, it is harder to have social unity (Dunbar & Sosis, 2018). A larger community is more likely to have weak ties that broadly apply to all groups (Poland & Maré,

2005). While smaller communities tend to be inward-looking, focusing on one unifying feature. They have an easier time with communication (Dunbar & Sosis, 2018). GNP has both large and small communities. Their larger communities are West Glacier and St. Mary, while their smaller communities are Many Glacier, Polebridge and Two Medicine.

2.2 Promotion of Community

In order to promote a stronger sense of community, several factors come into play. They all have an ability to affect the community in different ways. These factors include supervisor relations, social events, social media involvement, and the progression of time.

2.2.1 Supervisor Relations

It is important to connect new employees to their work groups and to their supervisors. Employees who are not integrated into their work groups are unaware of how to fit into the community. Integration into the community can be achieved when communication provided is deemed beneficial by employees (Karanges et al., 2015). Supervisor communication also plays a significant role in employee engagement in the community (Mikkelsen et al., 2017). Increasing employee engagement in events at the Park could be beneficial.

2.2.2 Social Events

Social events can bring people together (Porath, 2022). Participation in these social events is a way to form relationships with others that may not form organically (Kotani & Yokomatsu 2018).

Interest groups, or clubs, can help orchestrate regular events that bolster community culture (CSS., 2017). These networks increase member participation while making it easier to form interactions (Bryan et al., 2007). They allow participants to realize collective ambitions. Interest groups are most successful when they support the values of a workplace. The company creating the groups must also be invested in their support (Bryan et al., 2007). The National Park Service (NPS) is invested in these groups. They have a page on their official website dedicated to explaining the Employee Resource Groups and listing relevant ones (National Park Service, 2022). However, GNP does not have one of these pages. Interest groups can be supported through proper advertisement (Bryan et al., 2007).

2.2.3 Social Media Involvement

The use of social media has led to positive and negative impacts on communities. In the case of organized activities, it can enable a higher rate of participation. This is because social media widens the reach of information. It can allow open communication between individuals who would not normally interact (Wellmen et al., 2016). In the Park, online communication comes in the form of The Morning Report and Facebook page. The Morning Report is an email that is sent out to every worker on the GNP system. It contains daily updates about the Park and new information about events (S. Mandelko, Personal Communication, April 20, 2022). The employee Facebook page is used to connect people and provide information about events.

Although these traits show a positive influence on communication, over time it can cause isolation (Wellmen et al., 2016). The use of online communication creates an impersonal feel to conversation. It can inhibit an individual's ability to connect to a person or organization.

2.2.4 Progression Over Time

Given the progression of time, newcomers can be integrated into a community (Ramos et al., 2019). Communities are predisposed to determine ingroups from outgroups (Crisp & Meleady, 2012). In communities it is common for old members to be cautious of new members. (Nowak & Sigmund, 2005). In spite of this, research into xenophilia shows that humans share a natural urge to engage with outgroups (Stürmer et al., 2013). This can lead to an increase of interaction over time (Bowles, 2009).

In communities where members work and live, there is bound to be some turnover rate (McCole, 2015). In the case of the Park, the returning employees had more time to create common ties than the new employees (Ramos et al., 2019). This suggests a relationship between seasonal employee retention and the sense of belonging (McCole, 2015). That relationship is important reconsidering the high percentage of seasonal employees in the Park.

After exploring the information needed to characterize and promote a community, we were able to determine methods to achieve our goal.

3.0 Methodology

The goal of this project was to assess the sense of community at Glacier National Park in order to provide suggestions to strengthen it. This methodology describes three initiatives and related methods that were used to achieve the project goal:

1. Gather employee perceptions of community within the Park
2. Analyze responses to determine weaknesses and strengths in community
3. Develop suggestions and action items for the Park

The sense of the community was characterized based on employee perceptions as well as our literature review. Each of the five hubs were visited and investigated. This helped us understand how the employees defined a good community and whether they found it in the Park and their hub.

3.1 Gather Employee Perceptions of Community within the Park

Gathering employee perceptions was the first initiative of this methodology. In order to gather employee perceptions, the employee interview subjects needed to be identified. Employees were strategically selected through stratified and snowball sampling. The perceptions of the employees' selected were then understood and explored through semi-structured interviews and surveys.

3.1.1 Stratified and Snowball Sampling

We selected interview subjects using a mix of stratified sampling and snowball sampling. The process of stratified sampling divides the total population into subgroups (Elfil & Negida, 2016). To represent the population, specific proportions of individuals from each subgroup are selected. Although stratified sampling was not strictly used, it influenced our interviewee selection process. Each hub acted as a subgroup within this study. We further split each hub by work division, age, seasonality, and living location. The team selected multiple employees within each hub that fit subgroups. For example, interviewing a Law enforcement employee who was middle aged, a seasonal employee, and lived within the park at Two Medicine would represent each of those subgroups. Employees in different subgroups were selected for subsequent interviews. The team used a table, shown in Appendix F, to keep track of these employee

subgroups. This selection process ensured that each group had proper representation considering the total number of employees in each hub and their positions. Stratified sampling requires planning of the interview subjects whereas snowball sampling is incidental.

Snowball sampling uses prior subjects to identify subsequent subjects (Elfil & Negida, 2016). At the end of each interview, we asked the subject for any co-workers willing to be interviewed. Possible interview subjects were either contacted in person or with a standard email, shown in Appendix B.

3.1.2 Semi-Structured Interviews

Data was collected through semi-structured interviews. These interviews allowed the conversation to remain open ended while capturing complex information. They started with a short list of questions. Based on the responses, spontaneous follow-up questions were then asked. Some of the interview questions are:

- What does a good community mean to you/ How do you know when you have one?
- Do you find that sense of community here at Glacier? Why or why not?

The rest can be seen in Appendix A. The interviews were conducted in the Park with a variety of employees. We guaranteed confidentiality in these interviews, allowing for more accurate responses. To collect these responses efficiently, interviews were conducted in teams of four with two main speakers and two recorders.

3.1.3 Surveys

Due to the geographic separation between hubs, in-person interviews were augmented with surveys. Surveys allowed the group to gather a larger quantity of responses from all areas of the Park. The survey was sent out to employees in the GNP's Morning Report. This increased overall input and ensured equal representation of employees throughout the Park. A good survey contains concise questions, takes less than ten minutes to answer, and produces consistent results (Story & Tait 2019). This was taken into consideration when we created the survey questions. The survey questions were developed from the previous interview questions and expressed in a more concise way. Some questions contained in the survey are:

- What does a good community mean to you?
- Do you find that sense of community here at Glacier? Yes or No

The rest of the survey can be seen in Appendix C. The employee perceptions gathered from surveys and interviews were then analyzed.

3.2 Analyze Responses to Determine Weaknesses and Strengths within Community

The second initiative of the methods was to analyze responses to determine weaknesses and strengths. We were able to do this after gathering 66 responses from GNP employees.

The qualitative data gathered through interviews and surveys was analyzed with a coding method, called content analysis. This method quantified and revealed common themes presented in the responses. Quantified data enables comparison of the weight for each of the common themes. This coding method placed the responses into descriptive categories. The descriptive categories are then gathered into overarching themes.

Figure 3 is a plausible example of content analysis our team developed for explanation purposes. The coded table in Figure 3 is for the interview question "What does community mean

to you at Glacier National Park?” The responses, categories, and themes are generated from a study of community by University of Kansas (University of Kansas, n.d.). Ideas and concepts shared in the responses are organized into descriptive categories on the left side of the table. Within a column, tallies are entered for each category mentioned by a respondee. Tallies in each category are then added up so they are quantifiably comparable. Categories are color coded into overarching themes to represent general answers to the question (Schmidt, 2004).

What does community mean to you at GNP?

Categories	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Sum
Values	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓		✓		6
Location	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓				5
Demographic		✓		✓				✓			3
Opinions				✓		✓			✓		3
Opportunity		✓	✓			✓					3
Efficiency						✓			✓		2
Activities/Lifestyle			✓			✓					2
Friendship	✓	✓			✓						3
Belonging	✓	✓		✓				✓			4

Shared Aspects

Career

Social Life

Figure 3. Plausible example of coded data

Content analysis reveals the themes present in employees' perceptions. If interview questions are too structured, many perceptions will be left out and there will be fewer themes present (Schmidt, 2004). Once the general themes were discovered through these interviews, the questions for the survey were written to further explore these themes. Both the interviews and surveys asked similar questions and resulted in similar feedback. Therefore, responses were analyzed together. From this analyzed data, we developed suggestions and action items.

3.3 Develop Suggestions and Action Items for the Park

Developing suggestions and action items was the third initiative of this methodology. The analyzed interview and survey responses helped clarify the complex problems in the Park community. The team used the most common solution mentioned by employees to determine suggestions to strengthen the sense of community at the Park. These suggestions were developed through Osborn's brainstorming and starbursting.

3.3.1 Osborn's Brainstorming

Osborn's brainstorming is a type of verbal brainstorming used in our study. The rules of the process include: not criticizing, generating a lot of, building off of, and encouraging out-of-the-box ideas (Mongeau & Morr, 1999). In this process we used the data from the content analysis and responses. For example we looked at the responses pertaining to a theme such as social boundaries from our content analysis. During this process, we agreed that boundaries between supervisors and subordinates created some of these problems. We took notes on all of

the concepts discussed and summarized each idea at the end. The key ideas discovered were then put through the starbursting method to develop further.

3.3.2 Starbursting

Starbursting is a late-stage brainstorming method that produces questions rather than answers (Kishore, 2021). It uses a previously generated idea that the team wants to explore further. It asks the questions: who, what, when, where, how, and why. Figure 4 helps visualize this exercise.

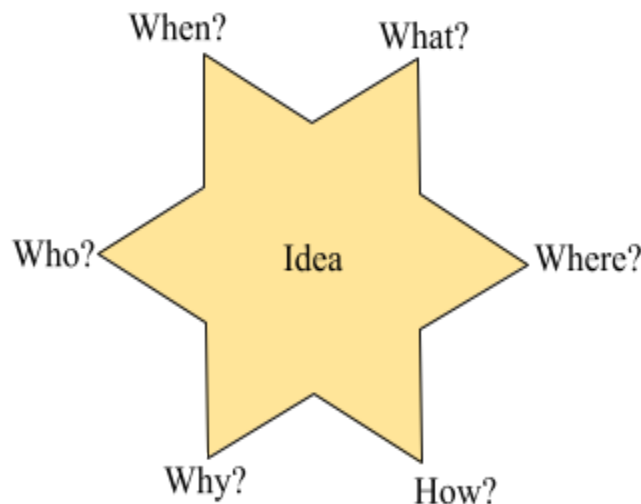


Figure 4. Starbursting visual representation

Our process involved discussing the questions and writing down possible answers. Starbursting helped produce helpful thoughts and implications for all aspects of an idea, not just the obvious ones. One idea that was used in this method was the high turnover of staff. For this idea, when asking, “Who is responsible?” the answers were seasonal employees and the higher-ups who create policy. When asking, “Where?” the answer included the whole Park, but we realized the turnover impacts the larger hubs more. This method assisted us in finding missed pieces of the whole problem. The team used this method to produce recommendations and action items.

4.0 Findings

The goal of the project was to assess the sense of community at GNP and provide recommendations to strengthen it. This chapter examines the information that the team gathered from Park employees to address the project goal. We arranged the information according to how participants described their communities as well as what could be improved. These findings will be explored across the Park and within each of the five hubs.

4.1 Sense of Community

A sense of community was determined by talking with its members. Because there were five separate communities, the discussion will look at them independently and Park-wide.

4.1.1 Park-wide

Through analyzing employee responses across the Park, we discovered a Park-wide sense of community is not present. An employee from St. Mary said, “I feel I am part of some communities within Glacier, but I do not feel like Glacier as a whole has a community to be a part of. The geographic divides, workgroup silos, and scarcity mindset influences the Park to have many micro communities rather than one overarching connected group.” An employee from Two Medicine states, “I had a community of my work group more than a Glacier community.” This shows that there is a widely adopted view of feeling part of one community but not Park-wide.

4.1.2 Within the Hubs

The previous view can be better understood by looking within the five separated communities. In Polebridge, Many Glacier, and Two Medicine, we identified an adequate sense of community within their hubs. In contrast, we found that West Glacier and St. Mary do not. This is seen in Figure 5. It is a visual representation of the different levels of satisfaction found within the different hubs in the Park. For this reason, the five hubs will be grouped by their senses of community and discussed accordingly.

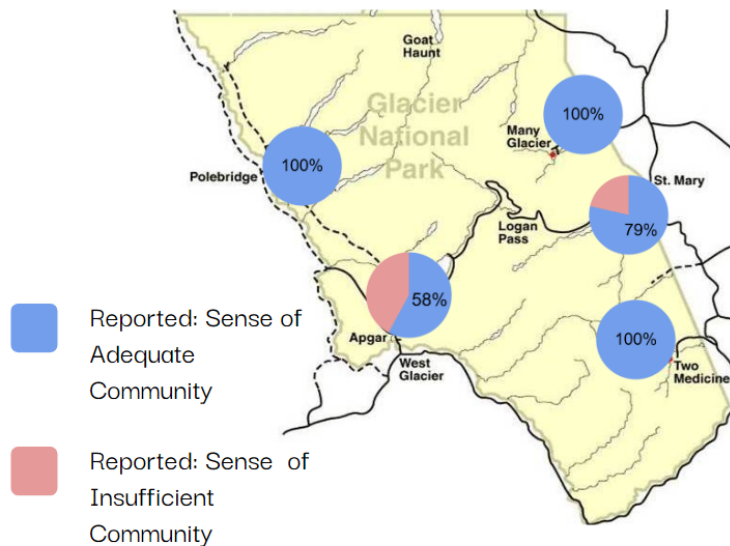


Figure 5. Representation of internal community perception throughout the hubs at GNP.

4.1.3 West Glacier & St. Mary

The sense of community at West Glacier and St. Mary was not as strong as the other hubs. 79% of respondents from St. Mary found a supportive sense of community as opposed to 58% in West Glacier. Although St. Mary reported a more adequate sense of community than West Glacier, they reported a similar range of perceptions about it.

These range of perceptions about the community include:

1. An inadequate sense of community
2. A satisfactory sense of community
3. No desire for Park community

These views are supported by the following employee responses. A West Glacier employee states they have “been here almost five years and [they] still don't have friends.” Another wrote that they “feel a strong connection to the Park and others who work here.” The third viewpoint is supported by another response that they have “moved on” from seeking community within the workplace, and seek it elsewhere.

The factors that define the sense of community in these two hubs are location, size, and shared events. West Glacier and St. Mary employees seek community fulfillment elsewhere, since both hubs are near towns and outside amenities. However, there are more amenities around West Glacier, so more community members are drawn out of the Park. This separates the living and working communities. Aside from this separation, size greatly affects the sense of community.

West Glacier and St. Mary are the largest hubs with the most employees. The large number of employees makes it difficult to form strong ties, separating the working groups. One West Glacier employee reported, “[the community] is very fragmented. Each division does its own thing.” Separation of divisions divides the work community, which impacts the living community in the Park.

Within these two hubs, lack of shared events also impacts the living community. Shared events and gathering places were common desires reported in these hubs. One employee from St. Mary described that, “having a place where we could host potlucks and other community events is VITAL to having a strong community.” This view is shared by West Glacier employees on a larger scale and will be discussed in detail in later sections. These defining factors that make up West Glacier and St. Mary’s sense of community are not as much of an obstacle in the other hubs.

4.1.4 Polebridge, Two Medicine, & Many Glacier

Polebridge, Two Medicine, and Many Glacier have reported a strong sense of community. Those who were interviewed and those who responded to the survey from these hubs reported a 100% adequate internal sense of community, as seen in Figure 5. Some factors that influence these views of community are size, remote location, and regular events.

The smaller size of these three hubs appears to allow for a “small town” feel. Everyone knows each other and employees share their workloads over the course of a busy season. One employee described that in their hub they “bump into each other a lot”. Employees from these three hubs also stated their geographical remoteness as a beneficial aspect of their communities. The lack of accessible events outside of their hubs forces them to create a community within themselves. These three hubs all have regular events that are largely attended. An employee from Many Glacier discusses their biweekly potlucks as a major defining aspect of their strong community. Another employee from this hub defined these potlucks as, “meaningful because anyone is welcome to join the group and interact with people you might not ever see at work.” While these factors help to understand their adequate sense of community, the problems at each hub are crucial to discuss.

4.2 Community Problems and Solutions

When employees talk about the community, they frequently mention its problems and solutions. There are problems with the sense of community Park-wide, and individually within each hub. The problems and solutions are fairly similar at West Glacier and St. Mary. As a

whole, West Glacier experiences these issues more profoundly. At Polebridge, Two Medicine, and Many Glacier, fewer problems were reported.

4.2.1 Park-wide

As established in section 4.1.1, the overall sense of community Park wide does not exist. Each hub has their own reported problems. However, two large problems reside Park-wide. These are Employee Lead training and Park-wide events.

One supervisor position at the Park is Employee Leads. They are a type of supervisor tasked with integrating new employees into the work environment. Integrating new employees into the social scene is not officially part of the Lead's job. While some Employee Leads take the time to introduce their employees into this social scene, others do not. One employee stated, "All supervisors are different, and it would be beneficial for consistent supervisor training." This lack of streamlined supervisor-employee training creates problems. It results in an inconsistent information exchange throughout the Park. The lack of communication to employees leads to decreased participation in the community. This is mainly because community members are unaware of the events going on around them. The large distance and travel time between hubs prevents regular in-person interaction between employees. One employee says there are "few events Park-wide," and suggests more events as a solution.

4.2.2 West Glacier & St. Mary

While talking to employees, we found many problems and solutions within West Glacier and St. Mary. West Glacier and St. Mary have a similar sense of community, therefore similar problems. The top problems identified from employee responses at West Glacier and St. Mary are listed by frequency in descending order:

1. Independence between working groups
2. Lack of activities
3. Inadequate housing
4. Online meetings that reduce face-to-face interaction
5. Separation of working and living communities
6. No central gathering location
7. Improper information exchange between supervisors and subordinates

These seven problems will be discussed in the order listed above.

In West Glacier and St. Mary, independence between workgroups was reported. 22 out of the 38 interviewed or surveyed employees in West Glacier mentioned independence between working groups as an issue that hinders their sense of community. This independence prevents employees from getting to know each other. Many employees from both of these hubs reported a lack of "working together" across divisions as a large issue for their community. The lack of working together can cause tension and disconnect. To solve this, An employee from West Glacier mentioned "giving each other the benefit of the doubt," and sharing the workload as a solution. Another suggestion from employee responses to increase employee interaction outside of work was more frequent events.

Few events in West Glacier and St. Mary reportedly cause an inadequate sense of community. Increasing the number of scheduled events was the top suggestion made by employees from these hubs. An employee from St. Mary suggested "more events at [the] beginning of [the] season." Hosting more events in the beginning of the season can help integrate

seasonal employees when they arrive. Specific event suggestions from employees include birthday parties, potlucks, gear swaps, sports competitions, cooking competitions, barbecues, trivia, nerd walks, yoga, roller skating, and many more.

Housing is a major problem reported by these hubs. 19 out of 38 employees interviewed and surveyed from West Glacier thought housing was a problem. As discussed in 2.1.1, an individual's need for housing must be met before social connections can be fostered. Adequate housing in the Park is not provided for over half of employees. Because of this, the majority of employees live outside the Park. At these hubs, the main suggestion is to, "provide guaranteed housing."

Many meetings have been held online since the pandemic. Online meetings reportedly streamline the transmission of information. However, an employee from West Glacier said, "Teleworking the past two years didn't allow for making connections with new co-workers." When meetings are not in-person, making connections is much harder. Suggested solutions to this problem include holding in-person meetings whenever possible.

The separation of working and living communities is caused by employees commuting outside of the Park. This creates problems for the Park community since an individual gives priority to a single community that they are involved in. An employee in West Glacier said that at the end of the day, they make a "left hand turn and [they're] never coming back" to participate in social events. This refers to turning left out of the Park and not returning until the next work day. Another staff member who commutes said, "my sense of being part of the community has diminished with the added distance." The reported solution was to spend more time together inside the Park.

West Glacier and St. Mary lack a common gathering space. A community building exists in West Glacier, however the pandemic shifted its use into a workspace. A West Glacier employee said the Park should "Open the community building to events." A St. Mary employee suggested the 1913 Ranger Station as a community building. Employees desire amenities like couches, books, games, and other supplies in common gathering space.

4.2.3 Polebridge, Two Medicine, & Many Glacier

The smaller hubs vary from the situation described above. These three hubs reported similar problems and solutions too. However, they did not have many problems that hindered their sense of community. When asked about problems with their community, one Many Glacier employee was surprised. They asked, "is this for real?" The suggested solutions for a strengthened community in these hubs include providing adequate housing and being more thoughtful towards seasonal employees.

In terms of housing, even the smaller hubs are affected. Half of employees interviewed identified housing as areas for improvement within their communities. None of these communities have enough housing for their employees. In these hubs, there are no other nearby areas for employees to live. Because of this, they cannot commute from elsewhere. An employee from one of these hubs stated that they had a coworker, "sleeping in a shed. They have no water or heat." Employee solutions to this problem ranged from hiring less employees to guaranteeing all employees housing. Under the problem of housing, the smaller hubs are lacking infrastructure. They are less developed. One employee in these smaller hubs said that "most campgrounds have [an information kiosk], but we just have a tent."

The treatment of seasonal employees by leadership is also reported as a problem in these hubs. The majority of leadership is located in West Glacier. One employee from Two Medicine stated that “Glacier's leadership [does] not demonstrate caring for seasonal employees.” Despite this claim, community members report higher retention rates in the smaller hubs. Employees from Many Glacier, Polebridge and Two Medicine have reported that the “core group of people always come back” and that some employees “have been here forever.” The reasoning for this seems to be the sharing of common ties. Creating common ties is easier with the advantages of small communities.

The problems and solutions brought up by members of the community will be used to provide recommendations in the next chapter. The recommendations will take the feasibility of the proposed solutions into consideration.

5.0 Recommendations

The goal of this project was to assess the sense of community at GNP and provide recommendations to strengthen it. Based on the findings in this study, there are six proposed solutions to achieve this.

- Create consistent training for Employee Lead/supervisor positions
- Transition online meeting and training to in-person
- Host more frequent local and park-wide events for employees
 - Include events like birthday parties, potlucks, gear swaps, sports competitions, cooking competitions, barbecues, trivia, nerd walks, yoga, roller skating, etc.
 - Form interest groups to host events
 - Focus the timing of these events to early season to integrate seasonal employees
- Increase advertisement of events to spur participation
 - Have Leads tell their workers about events
 - Ensure park members can get added to the Facebook page
 - Add a bulletin board in a highly frequented communal space
- Provide an informal communal space for employees to gather
 - Equip the communal space with amenities like wifi, couches, books, and other resources
 - Open the West Glacier Community Building and the St. Mary 1913 Ranger Station as a communal space for employee use
- Guarantee adequate housing for employees

After we assessed the sense of community, we discovered that GNP employees found many problems with it. These problems differ in severity across the Park. We suggest the recommendations stated above in order to strengthen the sense of community at the Park. Despite the reported inadequate Park-wide sense of community, employees continue to return. They do so for the Park’s mission: to preserve the scenic glacially carved landscape, wildlife, natural processes, and cultural heritage at the heart of the Crown of the Continent for the benefit, enjoyment, and understanding of the public.

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Appendix A: Interview Script for GNP Staff

We are a group of students from Worcester Polytechnic Institute, located in Massachusetts. We are interviewing the GNP staff to obtain data on the community within GNP. This project is run through GNP and a part of our college curriculum. Our project goal is to enhance the community spirit among employees. This goal can be better accomplished through your help and understanding your experience at GNP. Your participation is voluntary and you can opt out at any point. Your answers will be completely anonymous.

Introductory questions:

- What is your position at the Park?
- How long have you worked for GNP?
- Do you live in park housing?

Main questions:

- What does a good community mean to you/ How do you know when you have one?
- Do you find that sense of community here at Glacier? Why or why not?
- Did you feel welcomed when you came to Glacier? How has that shifted through each summer season? How has that shifted over the course of your employment?
- What events (if any) do you participate in at Glacier?
- What could the Park do differently in order to increase the sense of community?
- Are there any materials that would help you assimilate/ease into park culture?

Appendix B: Interview Email Template

Hello [Employee Name],

We are a team of WPI students (Worcester Polytechnic Institute in Worcester, MA) currently conducting a seven week research project in Glacier NP that seeks to understand and perhaps strengthen a sense of community among Park employees. We are working with Sierra Mandelko. In our effort to collect information, Sierra strongly recommended we talk with you. In your position as [Position], we think you can help us with our project. Would you be willing to meet with us and answer some questions that we've prepared, with Sierra's help, on the community situation at Glacier NP? Are you available tomorrow or anytime next week for an in person meeting or phone call? We have a car and can travel to wherever you are in the Park.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Katie Buek, Chemical Engineering, Kennett Square, PA,
Liam Hoyle, Mechanical Engineering, Leominster, MA,
Livia Hernon, Biomedical Engineering, New London, NH,
Nicholas Panzardi, Mechanical Engineering, Santa Cruz, CA

Appendix C: Survey for GNP Staff

A Study of Community in Glacier National Park

Hello Glacier National Park team members! We appreciate your help with this survey. We're a team of WPI (Worcester Polytechnic Institute) students here in Glacier. We're working on a project with Sierra Mandelko. Our report will be submitted to the Park Administration by mid-October. The goal is to help strengthen the community with suggestions and action items. Your responses will really help the Park!

Question 1:

What does a good community mean to you?

Question 2:

Do you find that sense of community here at Glacier?

- Yes
- No

Question 3:

When you first arrived at Glacier, did you feel welcome?

- Yes
- No

Question 4:

After being here for a while, do you feel like you are part of the community? Why or why not?

Question 5:

Over the course of a season, the strength of community at Glacier:

- Increased
- Stayed the same
- Decreased

Question 6:

What formal/informal events have you participated in Glacier this summer? Why were they meaningful?

Question 7:

If you were in charge, what would you do to strengthen the community?

Question 8:

How long have you worked in the Park?

Question 9:

What type of employee are you?

- Full-time
- Seasonal

- Volunteer
- Other

Question 10:

What division do you work for?

- Facilities
- Headquarters
- Intrep and Education
- Law Enforcement
- Science/ Resource Management
- Other

Question 11:

What hub do you work in?

- Many Glacier
- Polebridge
- St. Mary
- Two-Medicine
- West Glacier
- Other

Question 12:

(Optional) If you would like to talk to us in person, we would be happy to meet you! If so, please leave your email address!

Appendix D: Coded responses to Interview Questions

What are the problems with the Glacier National Park community?

Categories:	Total
Differing schedules	8
Isolation between working groups	27
Distance to activities	2
Orientation	4
Improper information exchange	8
Lack of activities	24
Staff leave after work	13
Staff does not attend events	6
Budget / Funding	4
Lack of / Inadequate housing	22
High turnover in staff	8
Isolation between Hubs	16
Isolation between employees	18
Wages	3
Cumbersome policies	8
No central hangout spot	13
Busy workload	8
Themes:	
Physical Boundaries	62
Social Boundaries	77
Recognizing individual needs	29
Time Constraints	24

What is your definition of a good community?

Category:	Total
People living in the same place	11
Lookout for each other	30
Communication	12
Shared interests	5
Minimal conflict	4
Respectful of others and their situations	21
Oppurtunity to learn from eachother, change perspective	7
Work together	18
Shared values	10
Honesty	3
Feeling comfortable	17
Feeling welcome	10
Activities/gatherings	9
Familiar with each other	15
Spending time together	17
Themes:	
Inclusion	50
Empathy	90
Participation	49

What would you do to strengthen the community at Glacier National Park?

Category:	totals:
Train supervisors	4
Combined east west events	4
Lay off on policy	7
Regularly scheduled activities	29
Accessible event times	8
Build enough housing	14
Common meeting area	14
Retirement plan and employee benefits	2
More considerate of tribal relations	2
All-employee meetings	2
Celebrate birthdays	1
Increase overlap of job sectors	12
More informal meetings	6
Increase advertisement of events	8
Need organising personalities	5
Employee interest groups	1
More enthusiam towards building community	7
In-person meetings / orientation	9
More vocal appreciation	4
Build more employee facilities	1
Make orientation better	2
Themes:	
Increase communication	82
Better infrastructure	29
Displays of Empathy	31

Appendix E: Demographic Tables

(S. Mandelko, Personal Communication, August 29, 2022)

Location	Total Occupants	Seasonal	Full Time
Many Glacier	80	80	1
Polebridge	15	12	3
St. Mary	130	110	+/- 20
Two Medicine	15	15	0
West Glacier	330	250	70-80

Many Glacier Employees	Live at park	Don't live at park
Seasonal	+/- 70	5-10
Full time	1 (seasonally move off Park)	1 (off season)

Polebridge Employees	Live at park	Don't live at park
Seasonal	10	5
Full time	3-5 (seasonally move off Park)	3-5 (off season)

St. Mary Employees	Live at park	Don't live at park
Seasonal	+/- 90	+/- 20
Full time	+/- 10	+/- 10

Two Medicine Employees	Live at park	Don't live at park
Seasonal	12	3
Full time	2-4 (seasonally move off Park)	2-4 (off season)

West Glacier Employees	Live at park	Don't live at park
Seasonal	160-200	+/- 50
Full time	20-30	+/- 50

Appendix F: Interview Demographics Table

	West Glacier	Polebridge	St Mary	Two Medicine	Many Glacier	
Law enforcement	2	1		2	2	2
Interp and education	8			4		3
Facilities	2					
HQ	7	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	
Science/resource mgmt	19	2		7	1	3
Volunteer				1		
Seasonal	18	2		14	2	7
Full time	20	1			1	1
Young	6	1		3	1	3
Middle age	5					
Old	5	2		1	1	2
Families	7					
Live in park	10	3		13	3	7
Live outside park	17			1		1
Total Interviews	38	3		14	3	8
						total total:
						66