

The CommuniCoin Experiment: Digital Community Building for a New Era of Innovation

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Executive Summary

Platform Calgary – a non-profit, member-based organization committed to helping startups launch and grow – initiated The CommuniCoin Experiment to leverage emerging technologies for community benefit and explore the potential of digital community building.

This experiment sought to digitally reinforce and enhance community actions, envisioning Non-Fungible Tokens (NFTs) that serve as a digital representation of assets anchored in blockchain technology (referred to as digital coins, or CommuniCoins in this experiment) as catalysts for deeper connections and collaboration.

The objective of the CommuniCoin proof of concept was threefold: to learn, build, and engage. The experiment aimed to understand and explore the application of a digital representation of an asset or interest, in diverse community development. By conducting research, building a functional model, testing CommuniCoin technology solutions, and convening ecosystem collaborators to inform inclusive governance practices while encouraging increased community engagement and participation in activities in Calgary's tech community.

Key concepts introduced by the experiment emphasized the diverse roles of digital coins, encapsulating and representing assets within a decentralized network, with CommuniCoin's digital coin serving as a mirror reflecting the value and contributions of the represented community. The blockchain principles helped ensure transparency, security, and immutability, fostering a trustworthy environment for community members. Functionality specification was crucial, as the CommuniCoin set the stage for specific community actions, aligning with the experiment's objectives. Beyond functionality, they also played roles in fostering trust, and establishing reputation through user verification and shared governance practices.

Calgary's Innovation Week served as the proving ground. Innovation Week brings the tech community – from the tech-curious to seasoned entrepreneurs and investors – together in celebration of all that's happening in Calgary tech. Taking place over seven days, with 80+ events across the city, we used this initiative to test the CommuniCoins, addressing key challenges through technology partnerships, QR code deployments, and artistic collaborations for digital NFT art.

The outcomes and lessons learned from the CommuniCoin Experiment underscored the pivotal role of small-scale events and tech exploration, tracking diverse community actions, attracting new participants, strengthening community sentiment through governance frameworks, and overcoming barriers to adoption through user-friendly solutions. The experiment's implications and opportunities extend beyond its immediate context, serving as a guide for future community-building endeavours.

Introduction

Background

Platform Calgary is a non-profit organization dedicated to empowering startups in the tech community for every step of their journey, from launch to scale. Recognizing the potential at the intersection of technology and community, Platform, alongside other strategic partners, initiated The CommuniCoin Experiment.

The experiment explored the use of Non-Fungible Tokens (NFTs) within community contexts, aiming to digitally reinforce and enhance community actions and interactions. While the application of NFTs in community settings is relatively new, Platform Calgary saw this experiment as an opportunity to better understand how to build digital communities.

The CommuniCoin Experiment sought to unlock the potential of digital coins, envisioning them as catalysts for deeper connections, incentivizing positive contributions, and reshaping how communities collaborate.

This whitepaper provides insights into the genesis, approach, and outcomes of this initiative, ushering in a new era of community-driven innovation.

Goals & Why

The primary objective of the CommuniCoin Experiment was to delve into the transformative potential of digital community building during one of Platform Calgary's flagship events, with a focus on achieving the following key objectives:

LEARN | Understand and explore the application of cryptographic coins in developing diverse and robust communities.

BUILD | Research, build, and test coin technology solutions to advance the understanding of nascent platforms and practices.

ENGAGE | Convene ecosystem collaborators to inform inclusive governance practices and encourage increased engagement and participation with Platform Calgary.

“The CommuniCoin Experiment was an opportunity to learn, build and engage with Calgary’s tech community in new, exciting ways. It sought to lay the groundwork for how communities can integrate community engagement and connections. A key component was the community partners that came together to support this project, enabling the project team to actively leverage feedback to gauge outcomes and inform future initiatives.”

- Bilal Rasool, Director of Founder Success at Platform Calgary

Key Concepts

What is a CommuniCoin?

In the context of The CommuniCoin Experiment, a CommuniCoin serves as the linchpin, embodying a digital representation of assets that are fundamentally anchored in blockchain technology. Coins both define assets and how they are earned, while also specifying what can be done with them.

How do CommuniCoins work?

CommuniCoins are non-fungible tokens (NFTs) that allow the digital building of identity, credibility and reputation of community members. They deliver impact to community members through building belonging and engagement within communities.

Digital community building is a relatively new concept, and in this case, examples like CommuniCoins can provide utility within a community by granting access to certain events, exclusive content, or voting rights on community decisions.

Key characteristics of digital tokens include:

- **Asset Representation:** They encapsulate and represent a diverse array of assets within a decentralized network.
 - ◆ CommuniCoins serve as a digital mirror, reflecting the value, contributions, and dynamics of the community it represents.
- **Blockchain Foundation:** They're built on a blockchain, a secure and transparent distributed ledger technology.
 - ◆ The blockchain foundation ensures transparency, security, and immutability, fostering a trustworthy environment for community members.
- **Functionality Specification:** They not only define assets, but also dictate the permissible actions that can be undertaken with them.
 - ◆ The CommuniCoin sets the stage for specific community actions, creating a structured environment that aligns with the experiment's objectives.
- **Identification Support:** They provide a mechanism for user verification without the need to divulge personal information.
 - ◆ Upholding privacy, CommuniCoin's token facilitates user verification, creating a secure environment where individuals can engage without compromising their personal data.
- **Trust Fostering:** They contribute to trust through shared governance practices and models within a decentralized network.
 - ◆ CommuniCoin leverages the inherent trust-building capabilities to establish a collaborative governance framework, ensuring that decisions are inclusive and reflect the community's collective vision.

- **Reputation Establishment:** They enable the establishment of user reputation by tracking and facilitating understanding of contributions and interactions within the network.
- ◆ The CommuniCoin becomes a tool for recognizing and appreciating community members, fostering a sense of belonging and encouraging active participation.

Governance Framework

Community Token Governance Framework

In laying the foundation for the CommuniCoin Experiment, particular attention had been given to crafting a comprehensive governance framework and defining the crucial layers of application. This was done early on in the project to ensure key standards, principles and rules were created to guide its successful execution..

Human Layer Application

The Human Layer is critical in outlining the "what" and "why" of the community. Leveraging existing community social contracts, goals, and behaviors such as event attendance, networking, connections, and feedback, the team created the CommuniCoin social contract (adapted from the [Rainforest Alberta Social Contract](#)).

Additionally, detailed persona exercises were conducted to understand the goals and behaviors of various community participants, setting a robust foundation for the project.

Governance Layer Application

This layer focuses on defining decision-making processes within the community, ensuring adaptability to both decentralized and centralized approaches. A more centralized approach was employed to lay the foundations of decision-making. The Governance Layer outlines how decisions would be raised, voted upon, and delegated to operational members. Importantly, rules within this layer are enforced through the Advisor coin, granting voting rights to token holders.

Token Layer Application

The Token Layer aims to define the utility of each token. Three main token types have been identified:

- **Attendance:** Earned for event attendance, providing access to raffles or digital collectibles.
- **Role:** Such as the Advisor governance coin, granting special rights and access.
- **Partner:** Distributed by partners to grant special access or benefits to community members.
- **Activity-Based:** Earned for positive community activities, such as providing feedback, with potential applications in networking, referrals, and introductions.

Each token was given a name as well as clear application instructions. Other rules around transferability and quantity were also defined.

Community Token Layers		
How communities interact	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Social contract (Principles)• Actions (forums/dialogs)• Personas	Human Layer
How communities govern/conduct	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Decision process• Community infrastructure• Community roles	Governance Layer
How communities exchange (value)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Types• Purpose• Utility & rights	Token Layer

Proof of Concept

Advisory Group

In steering the trajectory of the CommuniCoin proof of concept, a robust advisor group was assembled, made up of an array of perspectives, expertise, and backgrounds. This group played a pivotal role in offering feedback and strategic guidance.

The composition of the advisor group included Platform Calgary team members, partner organizations, and startups:

- Brigitte Legault, Manager, Community, [Rainforest Alberta](#)
- Craig Elias, Entrepreneur-In-Residence, [Bow Valley College](#)
- Helen Moore-Parkhouse, Director Communication and Engagement, [Calgary Arts Development](#)
- Ian Macdonald, Business & Innovation Leader, [KPMG High Growth Ventures](#)
- Raissa Espiritu, Director of Growth, [Platform Calgary](#)
- Sean Crump, Founder, [Included By Design](#)
- Vanessa Gagnon, Director Community, [Platform Calgary](#)
- Zak Biggs, Director of Communications, [Goodlawyer](#)
- Zamir Rahemtulla, Innovation, [Interac Corp.](#)

The advisor group operated as an active governance body, meeting throughout the duration of the project. Their main roles included:

- **User-Centric Perspectives:** Advocating for the needs and perspectives of end-users, ensuring the experiment remains accessible and impactful.
- **Strategic Feedback:** Providing strategic insights to refine the overall direction and objectives.
- **Project Alignment:** Ensuring alignment with Platform's mission, while fostering innovation and adaptability.
- **Risk Mitigation:** Identifying and addressing potential challenges, offering proactive solutions to mitigate risks.
- **Collaborative Decision-Making:** Participating in collaborative decision-making processes to ensure that the experiment benefits from collective wisdom.

"In every community, countless interactions generate valuable outcomes that often go unnoticed. Sustaining these community values as they scale and evolve presents a unique challenge. We were inspired by the potential of community tokenization to reveal and quantify this impact. Collaborating with Platform Calgary's vibrant and inclusive network, we found strength in unity, working together to advance our shared objectives fueled by innovation and openness."

- Zamir Rahemtulla, Innovation at Interac Corp.

Ecosystem Collaboration

Before launching the CommuniCoin at Innovation Week, we engaged the community to garner early feedback and learnings.



Test Events

We ran three tests at Platform Calgary's Tech Talent Tuesday event series. These events had between 20-40 attendees and allowed us to test the technology and deployments in a safe environment where we could get direct feedback.

Advisor Simulation Activity

With our advisory group, we ran a simulation activity to help us identify complexities in the project and adjust our assumptions. In our simulation, we focused on three use cases/coin types. The activity was meant to simulate the types of decisions and activities that would occur at Innovation Week. Each ~20 minute period was one day at Innovation Week, followed by a break to discuss initial lessons learned and create new rules to be put in place for the next round.

Innovation Week Scope

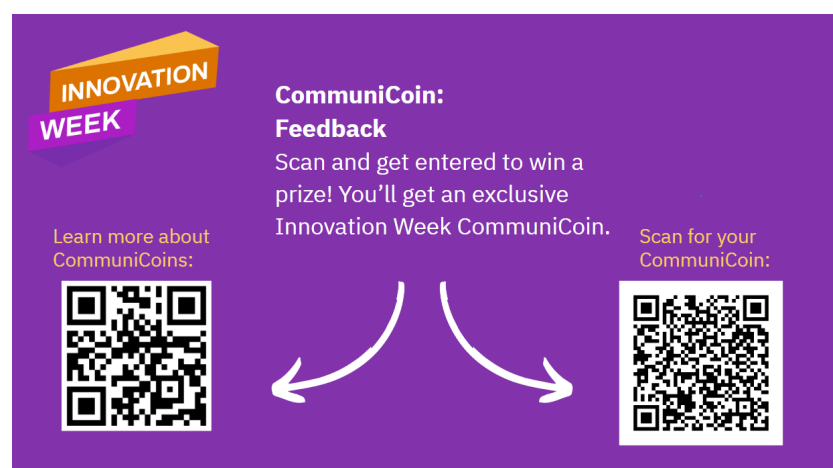
In executing the CommuniCoin Experiment, Platform Calgary strategically chose [Innovation Week](#), an annual week-long, city-wide tech showcase, as the proving ground for the CommuniCoin proof of concept. This section delineates the scope of the proof of concept, outlining its objectives, methodologies, and the overarching goals.

Key "How Might We" (HMW) Challenges

- HMW improve the monitoring of attendance metrics collection within the Platform Calgary community to support impact reporting.
- HMW leverage enhanced insight from audience data to improve the Platform Calgary ecosystem of events and programs.
- HMW create coins that celebrate and reward the Platform Calgary innovation community.

Events and Deployments

Operational execution played a pivotal role in ensuring a seamless integration of community tokens into the diverse array of events hosted by Platform Calgary.



1. Technology Partnership for Token Creation

To underpin the operational execution of CommuniCoins, a partnership was established with a technology provider specializing in token creation on their chain. While there was no out-of-the-box solution for this use case, we leveraged a partner that could provide the core capabilities we needed. The technological backbone formed the basis for the subsequent deployment and utilization of CommuniCoins at various events.

2. Artistic Collaboration for Digital NFT Art

A local artist was strategically engaged to design all CommuniCoins as digital NFT art. This artistic collaboration not only infused creativity into the project, but also transformed the tokens into collectible and visually appealing assets. The introduction of the project occurred across various digital channels, as well as during events, and through on-screen displays throughout the event locations.

3. QR Code Deployment

Operationalizing the distribution of CommuniCoins involved the deployment of QR codes at specific events or locations, presenting an accessible and user-friendly method to claim CommuniCoins. The process was separated into two stages, claiming and minting – allowing members to reserve tokens and return later to mint them. This approach accommodated diverse levels of familiarity and facilitated convenience for attendees.

4. Insights through Survey Mechanism

An integral component of the CommuniCoin Experiment was feedback. Whether from advisors, testers, or pre-event pilot users, feedback was collected through conversations, on-site support and user surveys. A survey was issued for each member who reserved a CommuniCoin – streamlining the claim process and providing a unique avenue for gaining insights.

Outcomes

The main goal was to understand the makeup of our innovation community and who was most likely to engage. Some key learnings include:

- Nearly half of those who engaged identified themselves as ‘Career Seekers,’ though each event had a slightly different makeup of attendees.
- More than half of those who engaged were first-time attendees of a Platform Calgary event.
- There was a large distribution of attendance by industry sectors ranging from oil & gas to fintech.



Lessons Learned

The CommuniCoin Experiment unveiled insights into the dynamics of digital communities, providing valuable considerations for the broader landscape of innovation and community building.

1. Tech exploration ignites community participation

There's a collective appetite within Calgary's tech community for adopting new technologies that foster shared experiences. It is through exploration and experimentation that we can find new ways to solve communal problems and enrich community engagement.

2. Diversity of new participants drive community enthusiasm

New innovations and experiments attract and captivate a diverse audience, infusing renewed enthusiasm into communities and introducing a way for newcomers to begin to engage.

3. Governance framework strengthens community sentiment

The governance framework resonated strongly with engaged participants. There's a pivotal role of governance in instilling a sense of ownership to foster trust and establish a positive sentiment within the community.

4. Decentralized implementation still requires advocacy and leadership

The experiment illuminated the inherent challenges in the implementation and

decentralization of power. Despite the complexity, a dedicated group of individuals championing the initiative is essential for overcoming challenges and ensuring success.

Implications and opportunities for digital community building

The CommuniCoin Experiment not only marks a significant milestone in the exploration of building digital communities, but also serves as a guide for future community-building endeavors. The lessons learned and conclusions drawn pave the way for a new era of innovation, where technology and community collaboration converge to create dynamic, engaged, and empowered communities.

Innovation as a community amplifier

Cutting-edge technologies are recognized as amplifiers for community participation, interaction, and shared experiences.

Diverse tokens for diverse engagement

Diversity in token engagement encourages broader community participation.

Governance: A pillar for community unity

A well-defined governance framework provides the scaffolding for community ownership and collective decision-making that reinforces communal values.

The goal of the CommuniCoin Experiment is to serve as a beacon for communities ready to redefine engagement, foster inclusivity, and pioneer a new era of community-driven innovation.