

WTF Is a POAP?

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TL;DR: POAPs, short for Proof of Attendance Protocol, are digital badges given to people who participate in online or in-person events. Built using blockchain technology, POAPs are NFTs that provide a way to verify - and commemorate - where you've been and what you've participated in.

Many of us collect keepsakes: theater playbills, concert tickets, stickers, race medals. We hold onto these objects because they remind us of meaningful moments in our lives. Sometimes we display them because they also say something about who we are, where we've been, and what we value.

As more of our experiences move online, POAPs offer a digital version of that same idea.

POAP - pronounced "poh-ap" - stands for Proof of Attendance Protocol. POAPs are design-centric digital badges given to people who participate in virtual or in-person events. Using blockchain technology, they are minted as NFTs through smart contracts and can serve as a permanent record of participation.

Think of them as the Web3 version of a ticket stub - except instead of ending up in a drawer somewhere, they live in your digital wallet.

POAPs also offer an interesting bridge between our physical and digital lives. For example, when Lily Wu, co-founder of WOW Pixies, spoke at a Women's Entrepreneurship Day Summit event at the United Nations, members of the WOW Pixies community gathered virtually to watch. Those who participated in the watch party received a blue POAP featuring the United Nations logo.

POAPs can commemorate in-person experiences, too. During NFT NYC, Boss Beauties distributed POAPs to community members who attended its Kesha concert after-party.

In both cases, the POAP becomes more than a digital image. It becomes proof that you were part of the experience.

How POAPs Work

POAPs are on-chain records of experiences associated with Web3 communities and events.

Unlike many NFTs, they are generally not designed primarily as financial assets. POAPs are typically free for both creators and collectors and are intended to represent participation rather than monetary value, although secondary trading can occasionally occur.

Because POAPs are recorded using blockchain technology, the record of participation is designed to be permanent. Collectors also do not necessarily need to provide personal information to receive one.

Each POAP is minted through the POAP smart contract and has a unique serial number connected to an image and metadata about the event, such as its name, date, and location.

To distribute a POAP, event organizers - known as issuers - usually give participants a URL or QR code. Participants, known as collectors, can then claim the POAP using an Ethereum wallet address or, in some cases, an email address.

Once claimed, POAPs can be viewed through POAP-supported interfaces and applications, giving users a digital collection of the communities and experiences they've participated in.

Beyond the Digital Souvenir

Where POAPs get especially interesting is in what happens after the event.

They may start as digital mementos, but companies and communities are experimenting with ways to use them as tools for engagement.

Warner Music Experience, for example, has discussed using POAPs as part of its Web3 strategy. A fan who receives a POAP for attending a concert could potentially use that badge later to access merchandise, special content, or another exclusive experience.

Other tools allow organizations to attach perks to people who hold particular POAPs.

That creates a new possibility: a POAP doesn't simply say, I was there. It can also become a key that unlocks whatever comes next.

A community might reward its most engaged members. A brand might give early access to an event or product. An artist might offer exclusive content to fans who have attended previous shows.

In that sense, POAPs can help turn one-time experiences into longer relationships.

A Digital Record of Where We've Been

POAPs are increasingly appearing across Web3 - displayed in wallets, shared on social media, and used by companies and communities looking for new ways to recognize participation.

Their appeal is surprisingly familiar.

For generations, we've kept physical reminders of the places we've gone and the things we've done. POAPs simply bring that tradition into our digital lives.

They're part souvenir, part credential, and part community-building tool.

And as our physical and online identities continue to overlap, that little digital badge may eventually say quite a lot about where we've been - and what we chose to be part of.

Portfolio copy prepared from the author's original text and edited for clarity.