

Thanks

Special thanks to the community moderators who shared their experiences and insights for this research. Your dedication to creating safe, inclusive online spaces has inspired us and made this work possible.

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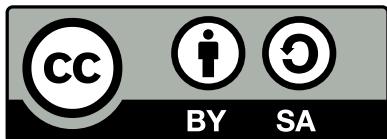


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LOCAL ONLINE COMMUNITY MODERATION

A Research-Based Guide for
Digital Community Leaders



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All across the United States local newspapers have been closing, leaving communities without a reliable source of information about their area. We were curious if local social media groups were able to fill this gap, and how they shared different or similar or different to newspapers. More specifically, we were interested in the experiences of moderators who helped create and run these groups; what sort of challenges they encountered, how their knowledge of the local area helped them serve, why they began moderating, and who they aided? We explored these questions, and others, through interviews and found that moderators play an important role in meeting their community's information needs. They also helped organize resource sharing during crises, built connections between community members, and kept locals aware of important civic and political events. Moderators' role is different from journalists, but still important in keeping their community informed and involved. This research shows how local moderators support their community's health and encourages platforms to invest more resources to assist local moderators.

What did we find?

About the Project

Not including detailed tutorials was intentionally Voluntarily changing—based on what's happening in their online community, their offline community, local politics, and on platforms.

Why No Step-by-Step?

- ✗ Professional social media management
- ✗ Legal liability and policy compliance
- ✗ Platform-specific technical tutorials
- ✗ Setting up a local group from scratch

This guide doesn't provide step-by-step instructions for:

What This Zine Doesn't Do

Local Focus: These strategies are written for online community groups tied to specific localities like neighborhoods and cities.

- Possible ways you can address these problems
- Some challenges you might face while moderating a community
- Ways you can serve your community
- How to become a moderator

This zine will introduce you to:

What This Zine Does

This booklet hopes to encourage individuals to engage in effective moderation of local online communities. It also aims to provide possible tools, solutions, and ideas for overcoming some of the common challenges that local moderators face.

What's Up With This Zine?

Your Community's Future

Keep Growing

If you are already involved in moderation, we hope this guide has offered some insight into the role's opportunities and challenges. If you're just getting started, remember: every strong community started with one person who cared enough to begin.

Remember your 'why' (or your next big idea for your group) — Tot it down or sketch it out here.

What's Next?

To help you grow as a moderator and strengthen your community, check out the additional resources and links in the QR code on the next page.

Next Page

♥ Final Thought: *Community moderation is not just about managing content—it's about nurturing the connections that make neighborhoods stronger, more resilient, and more caring places to live.*

Introducing Local Moderation

What is Local Moderation?

At its most basic, local moderation is the practice of creating and managing a place-based online community. What the group does and how it looks can vary, but helping neighbors connect, sharing information, and supporting each other's needs are common goals.

What Makes a Group Local?

In this context, local means a groups' attachment to a specific geographic area or connection to a specific location and interest. Below are some fictional examples of a local online community:

PLACE-BASED

- "Hill Country Events"
- "Northside News & Views"
- "Riverside Neighborhood Chat"
- "Lincoln Lane Happenings"

INTEREST + LOCATION

- "Austin Dog Walkers"
- "Portland Plant Swaps"
- "Chicago Bike Repair"
- "Denver Parents' Network"

Why Local Community Groups Matter

3200+

local newspapers closed since
2005

Across the country local newspapers have been collapsing due to a complex set of factors like declining ad revenue and changing news habits. This has created a massive barrier to accessing information about local politics, economy, and civil society.

Filling the Gap: Many local online communities on social media platforms have emerged to fill this information void. These communities—and the moderators who manage them—have become crucial resources for information and resource sharing. People now rely on these groups to stay informed and take action to help their community.

Community Building:

- At least 2-3 depending on size
- Clear responsibilities
- Encourage participation
- Welcome new members
- Address conflicts quickly
- Connect people with similar interests
- Shared decision-making

Moderation Team:

- Consistent enforcement
- Basic posting guidelines
- Simple membership rules
- Clear group purpose
- Start with quality over quantity
- Seed initial conversations
- Celebrate early contributors
- Adapt rules based on experience

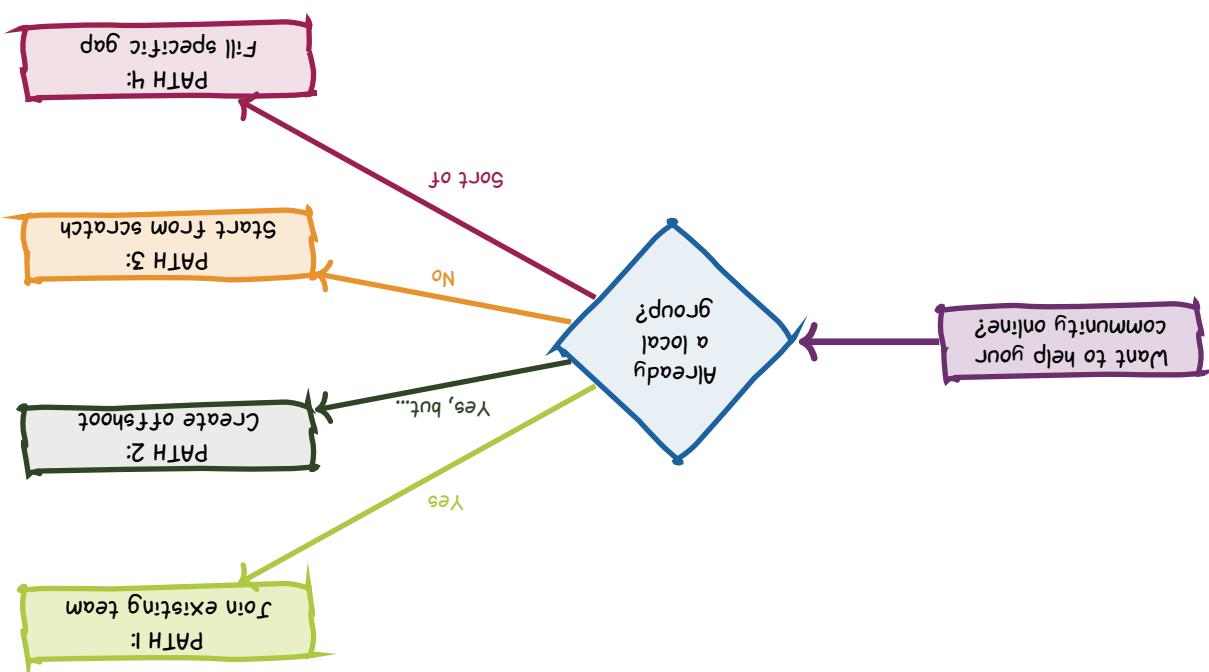
Growth Strategy:

- Adapt rules based on experience
- Start with quality over quantity
- Seed initial conversations
- Celebrate early contributors
- Adapt rules based on experience

Starting from Scratch? Here's What Every Community Needs:

Taking the leap to create or join an online community can feel scary. Fear of failure and inadequacy often stops us from serving our neighbors. This guide aims to lessen those concerns and encourage you to make that jump into helping your community.

Pre Talk Time!



Four Pathways to Community Moderation

So You Want To Be A Moderator?

- Local election information
 - Local policy impacts
 - City council meetings
 - Emergency information
 - Weather warnings
 - Crime updates
- A Public Safety:**
- Lost pets & found items
 - School information
 - Housing & rentals
 - Community events
 - Cultural & art information
 - Non-profit services
- B Civic Life:**
- Construction progress updates
 - Road closures
 - Public transit times
 - School board meetings
 - Educational opportunities
 - School performance assessments
- C Healthcare:**
- Service recommendations
 - Job postings
 - New openings/closings
 - Environmental hazards
 - Air & water quality
 - Sustainability efforts
- D Transportation:**
- Service developments
 - Job openings/closings
 - New openings/closings
 - Environmental hazards
 - Air & water quality
 - Sustainability efforts
- E Economic Development:**

Moderators identified many kinds of local information they felt were important to their communities:

Types of Information Communities Need



Local groups create spaces for residents to:

What Do Local Groups Actually Do?

Growing Sustainable Communities

Planning for the Long Term

 The most successful local communities think beyond the immediate crisis or need—they build systems that can adapt and grow over time.

Preparing for Growth

Scaling Moderation:

- Train additional moderators
- Document decision-making processes
- Create clear role definitions
- Establish conflict resolution procedures

Community Leadership:

- Identify emerging community leaders
- Create opportunities for member involvement
- Recognize valuable contributors
- Develop succession planning

Evolving Guidelines:

- Review rules regularly
- Gather member feedback
- Adapt to new challenges
- Learn from other communities

Offline Connections:

- Organize in-person meetups
- Partner with local organizations
- Support community events
- Engage local elected officials

 **Think of moderation like hosting:** Many moderators described their skills and moderation practices in a way that was similar to being a good host of a 'party'—making guests feel welcome, respected, and giving them space for conversations that leave everyone feeling more informed and connected, and wanting to attend your 'party.'

Who Are Moderators?

Online moderators are often the subject of negative stereotypes, perceived as power-hungry or narcissistic. In reality moderators are more often like any other local volunteers, people who see a need in their community and work to fill it. Ideally they are servant leaders, dedicated to making their neighborhood a better more informed place.

One or two people were like, "Hey, look for Tina. She gives out free plants. She helps people with stuff." And I'm like, "I'm just a regular person. I'm not a community leader. I don't think of myself like that." So maybe I am now.

TINA / Freecycle Group

I enjoy allowing the space. What keeps me going is the people...What got me to this point with my group now is I made something for my community. I made a huge impact on my community.

ERICA / Community News Group

When you publish something and people react to it positively or negatively...It feels like that makes a difference, just getting people talking...if I hadn't put that comment out there, nobody would even have thought about this issue.

JACK / Climate Change Project

Types of People Who Step Up

THE ORGANIZER

Sees gaps and steps up to fill them

THE CONNECTOR

Loves bringing people together

THE CARETAKER

Motivated by protecting community members

THE INFO KEEPER

Passionate about keeping community well-informed

❸ COMMUNITY EDUCATION

- Encourage source verification
- Share awareness resources
- Link to consumer alerts and other scam
- Model critical thinking
- Share official local resources

❹ EARLY DETECTION

- Check shared links to ensure they go to what they report to (catching link-jacking)
- Encourage users to share verified information or red flags
- Be on the lookout for suspicious accounts
- Monitor for hate-speech, incivility, and other kinds of trolling
- Early detection of hate-speech, incivility, and other kinds of trolling



❺ Diffusing Threats and Minimizing Harm

❻ Helping Community & Facilitating Productive Discussions

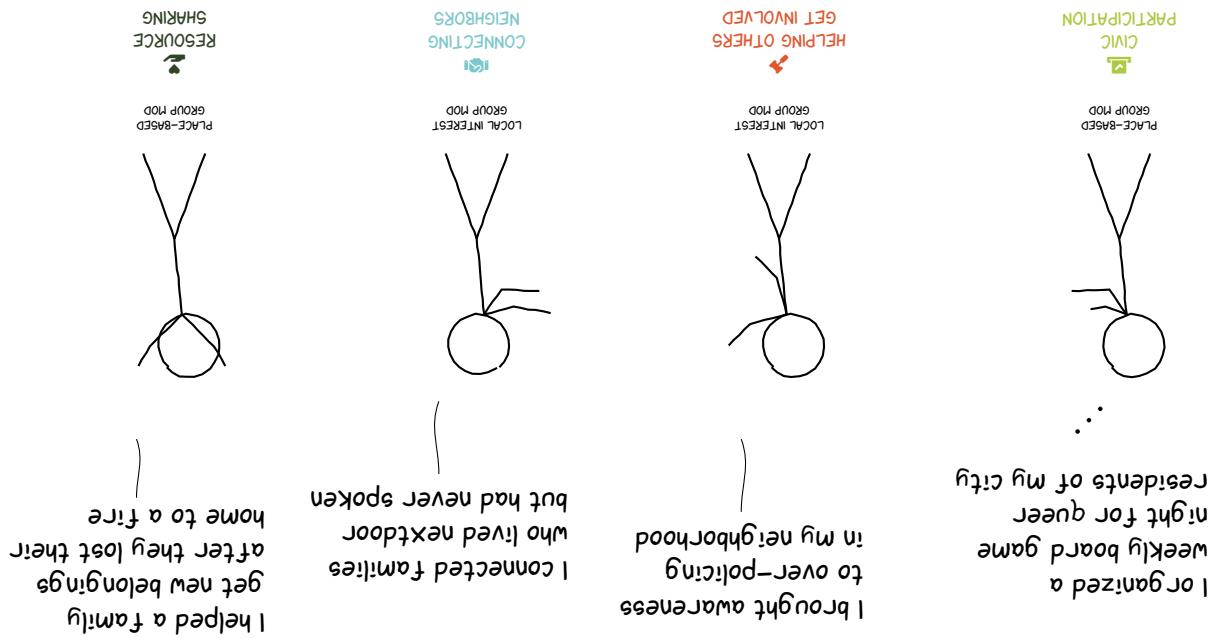
❻ Dealing with Spam, Scams, and Other Challenges

Key Areas of Focus

Moderators described their role as supporting a constructive local information ecosystem and as a defense against incivility. Their responsibilities extended well beyond content approval and removal to include connecting people to local resources, fostering community safety, and enabling communities to thrive amid platform constraints and volatility. Moderators assume proactive roles in managing conflict and promoting an open, inclusive environment.

Beyond Content Moderation

Countering Challenges



Strong, Connected, Informed Communities

↑ ↑ ↑ ↑

All These Functions Support

In the age of disappearance social services, moderators can help promote the exchange of resources for those in need.

RESOURCE SHARING

Moderators and their communities can help spread awareness and promote discussion about addressing local issues.

HELPING OTHERS GET INVOLVED

Community groups can help build connections between neighbors in an increasingly isolated and polarized world.

CONNECTING NEIGHBORS

Moderators promote events for community members to participate in, such as potlucks, cultural festivals, or local clean-up days.

CIVIC PARTICIPATION

Moderators and their groups serve communities in a variety of ways depending on the locality's context and the focus of the group. They facilitate accurate on-the-ground information and coordinate the flow of resources.

How Do Moderators Serve?

When Information Gets Messy

Having important local information isn't enough—moderators must navigate different levels of information quality, from crystal clear to completely chaotic.

The Information Quality Spectrum



What Each Level Looks Like (And What You Can Do)

☀️ CLEAR

Right information, right amount, right timing. Community naturally self-organizes and self-corrects.

Moderator role: Light touch, celebrate good practices

☁️ FOG

Slightly too much good information. Multiple people posting similar content. Some redundancy but all legitimate.

Moderator role: Gentle organization, create megathreads, direct 'traffic'

霾 SMOG

Off-topic posts, promotional content, spam make it difficult to see good info.

Moderator role: Active or aggressive filtering, corrections, member education

污染物 POLLUTION

Community overrun by coordinated harassment, threats, false emergency alerts, scams, and/or spam. Community trust is broken. Social relationships actively damaged.

Moderator role: Emergency response, platform escalation

More Ways Moderators Serve

⚠ DISASTER RESPONSE

During and after a disaster, moderators and their communities connect people with aid, services, and up-to-date information.

⌚ SAFE SPACE

Marginalized people often struggle to find safe spaces to socialize; online groups can help build community by fostering connection.

🗣 CONNECTING LOCAL LEADERS

Discussions about local issues can be powerful launching points for connecting with local leaders to solve shortcomings in the community.

❤ PERSONAL FULFILLMENT

Many moderators reported personal joy and fulfillment from serving their community, encouraging proactive engagement.



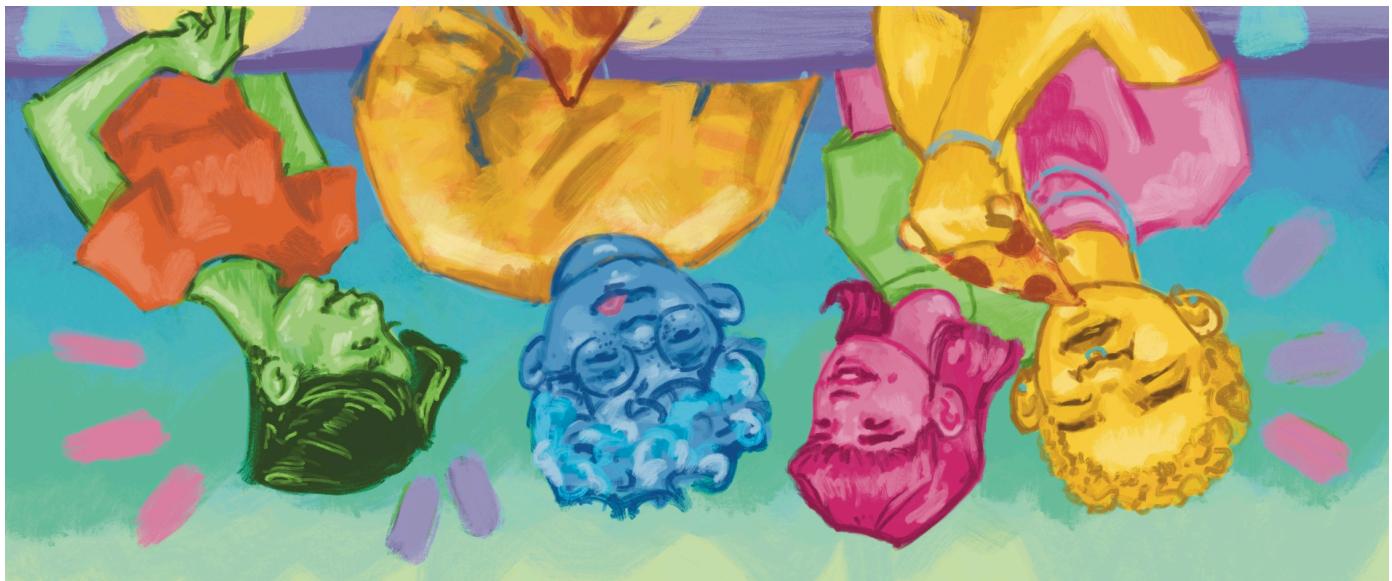
How Can You Serve?

Look Around Your Community

When you look around your city, town, or neighborhood, do you see a need that hasn't been met? Big or small, creating and moderating a community can begin the process of helping your local community grow stronger and better connected.

- Creating Welcoming Spaces:
 - Clear, fair, consistent guidelines
 - Quick response to problems
 - Celebrating positive contribution
 - Making newcomers feel welcome
 - Managing Conflicts:
 - Stay calm and neutral
 - Addresses issues quickly
 - Focuses on behavior, not people
 - Know when to seek help

Strategies for Building Stronger Communities



Moderators cultivate open and inviting spaces for all community members by using empathetic care, conflict management, and highlighting local connections.

Creating a Safe, Welcoming Environment for Local Connections

Build Thriving Communities

THE SOLUTION

Pin important posts. Create recurring weekly threads for common topics. Use platform-specific features like Facebook's "announcements" posts strategically.

THE PROBLEM

"My goals are almost constantly in conflict with the goals of the platform, which only seem to be spreading and monetizing low-quality content".

—TINA

THE SOLUTION

Establish clear rules about member-to-member correction. Create easy reporting systems. Encourage members to tag moderators for rule enforcement.

THE PROBLEM

"Folks will attack another post for violating a minor rule... They view themselves as vigilante hosts but they actually make the page quite hostile".

—ANNA

THE SOLUTION

Develop screening questions specific to your location. Ask new members to identify a local landmark or recent community event to make sure they are from or know the area. Set up automatic filters for common scam keywords.

THE PROBLEM

"Scammers and hackers come at the top because these posts are often inaccurate, misleading".

—LENA

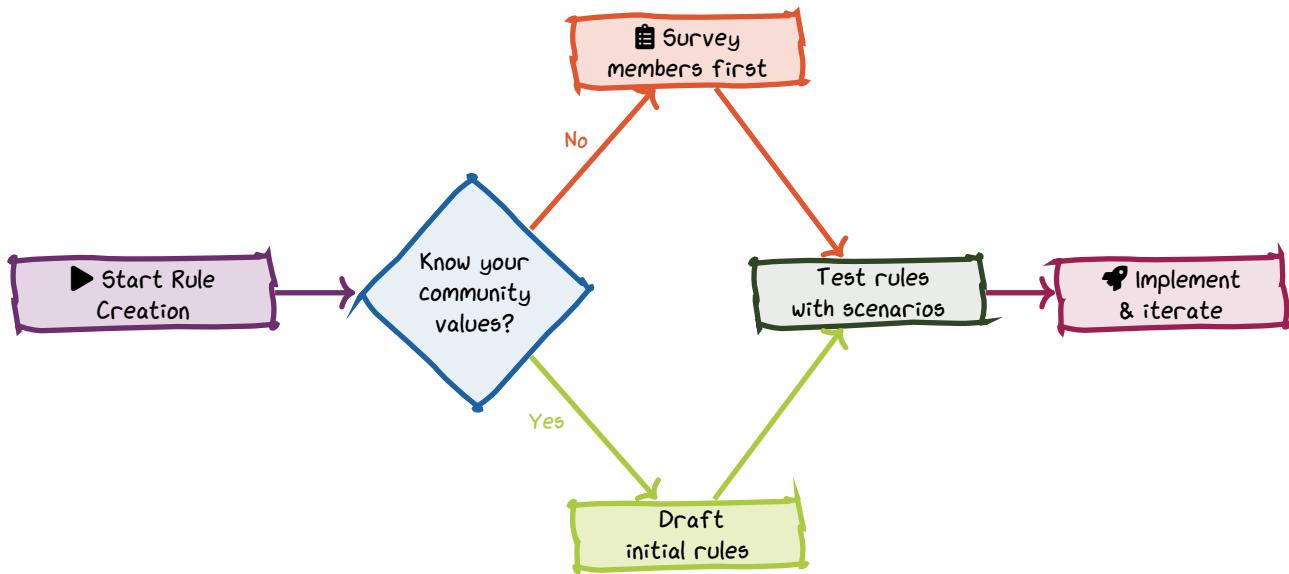
Challenge #1: Scams & Spam

When moderating, conflicts and challenges are bound to arise. It's important to be aware of what types of issues you might face and how you can address them. The list below covers the most common challenges reported by moderators, but it is not meant to be exhaustive.

Common Challenges You Might Face

Rule-Making Decision Guide

Start Here: Creating Your Rules



Quick Reference: Rule Violations

❓ “What do I do when...”

⚠ FIRST OFFENSE

- Private message
- Explain violation
- Offer guidance
- Give second chance

⟳ REPEAT OFFENSE

- Public warning
- Reference prior contact
- Enforce consequences

🔥 SERIOUS VIOLATION

- Immediate action
- Document everything
- Consult other mods
- Follow up quickly

Pro Tips: Advanced Strategies

👁 PREVENTION TACTICS

- Pin guidelines prominently
- Regular community reminders
- Welcome message with rules
- Ask potential members to agree to rules before joining

🤝 COMMUNITY BUILDING

- Celebrate good examples
- Thank helpful members
- Share success stories
- Create positive momentum

More Common Challenges

Challenge #4: Off-Topic Posts

⚠ THE PROBLEM

"Members don't understand the assignment. These are legitimate members who think the group is a place for lost cat ads"

— ANNA

💡 THE SOLUTION

Regularly post examples of ideal content. Create a pinned post explaining the group's purpose with specific examples. Redirect off-topic posts to appropriate groups and gently remind community members of the scope of your group.

Challenge #5: AI Users & Content

⚠ THE PROBLEM

"AI...doesn't filter the posts correctly most of the time and I have to personally check and manually approve or decline them and that takes a long time."

— DAISY

💡 THE SOLUTION

While AI can sometimes be a time-saver, it doesn't always understand humor or context. Expect mistakes and maintain close oversight to keep a human in the loop.

Challenge #6: Burnout

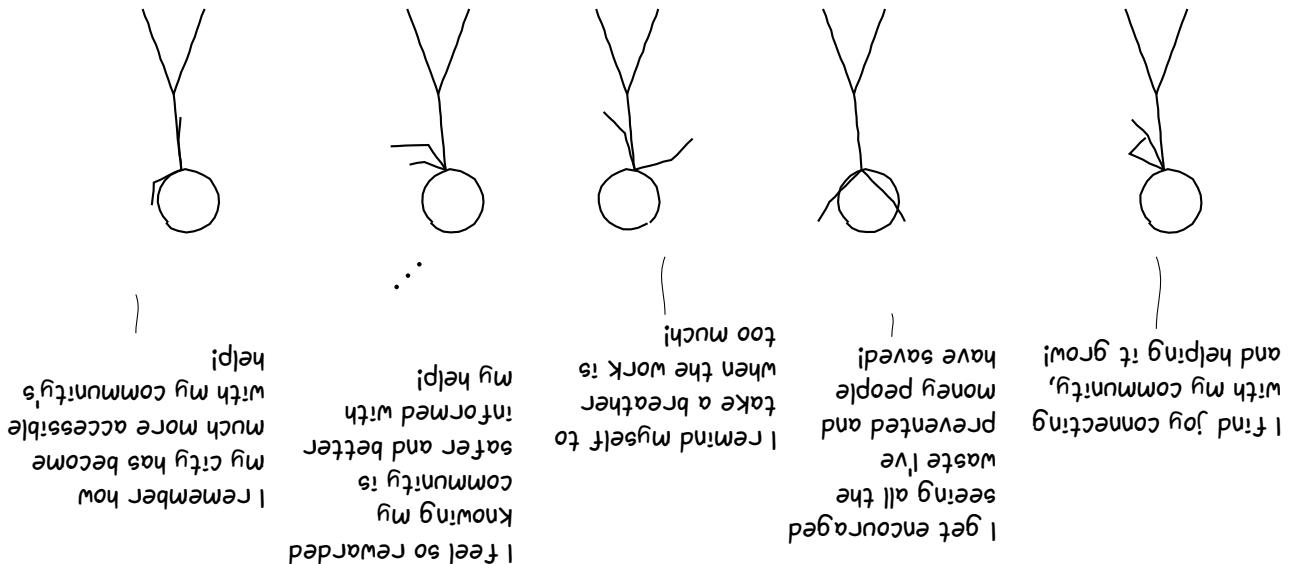
⚠ THE PROBLEM

"A lot of moderators are volunteers and have full-time jobs like me... people don't really think about the fact that I am not just this Facebook moderator."

— LENA

💡 THE SOLUTION

Depending on the group's size, building a moderation team of 2-3 people can reduce stress from burnout. Take breaks and set clear boundaries on your time—for example, only checking in during certain hours.



Thinking about your why? Flip to page 18 to jot it down or sketch it out.

When moderation gets challenging, remember why you started: to help your community be more connected, informed, and supportive. That purpose can carry you through the tough days.

Remember the Why

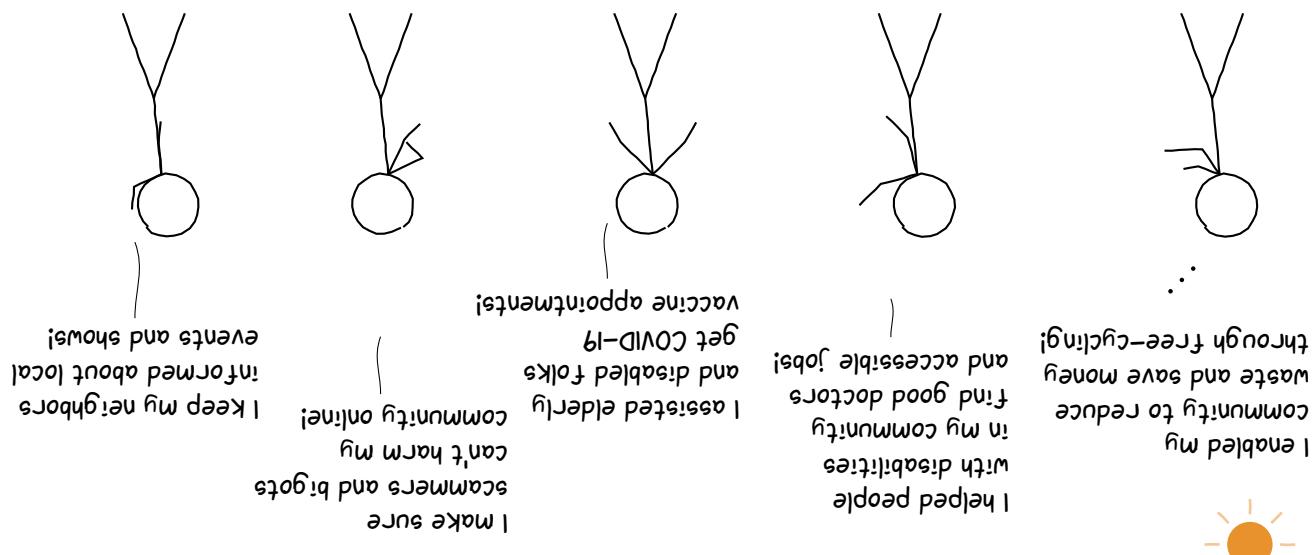
“I like seeing neighbors be there for each other. [...] What I like about moderation is you see neighbors rally for each other, and seeing that support kind of gives you a little hope that there is still kindness in the world and there is still good people that care about random strangers.” – Miley

“What I enjoy most about being a moderator is taking the initiative to ensure group participants have a fun, safe place to express their ideas, share information, and join in other conversations.” – Daisy

What Keeps Moderators Going

While moderators talk about challenges, most also highlight how rewarding it is to help their communities stay connected, informed, and supportive.

If Moderating is Hard, Why Do It?



DEMOCRACY ENABLER

Moderators create spaces to discuss local issues, share civic information, and participate in community decision-making.

CONNECTION FACILITATOR

Moderators help neighbors find each other, share resources, and build the social bonds that make communities resilient.

COMMUNITY GUARDIAN

Moderators can help protect community members from scams, harassment, and deepfakes while fostering positive connections.

INFORMATION HUB

Moderators serve as real-time neighborhood newsrooms, filtering and organizing information that helps people navigate daily life.

Moderators' Contributions

Annual value of unpaid moderation work on Reddit alone.

\$3.4M+

The Value of Moderators' Work