



Search for
Common Ground
Trust, Collaboration, Breakthroughs



**Community Stewards
and Social Cohesion
in Digital Spaces**

About

Search for Common Ground (Search) undertook this study with financial support from Meta. The study aimed to examine the role community stewards play in promoting healthy and safe online experiences for social media users, especially from conflict-affected societies. This report is the third in a series developed with support from Meta. The following members of Search's Institutional Learning Team led the research design and authored this report: Kaila Harris, Limou Dembele, Adrienne Lemon, and Marine Jacob.

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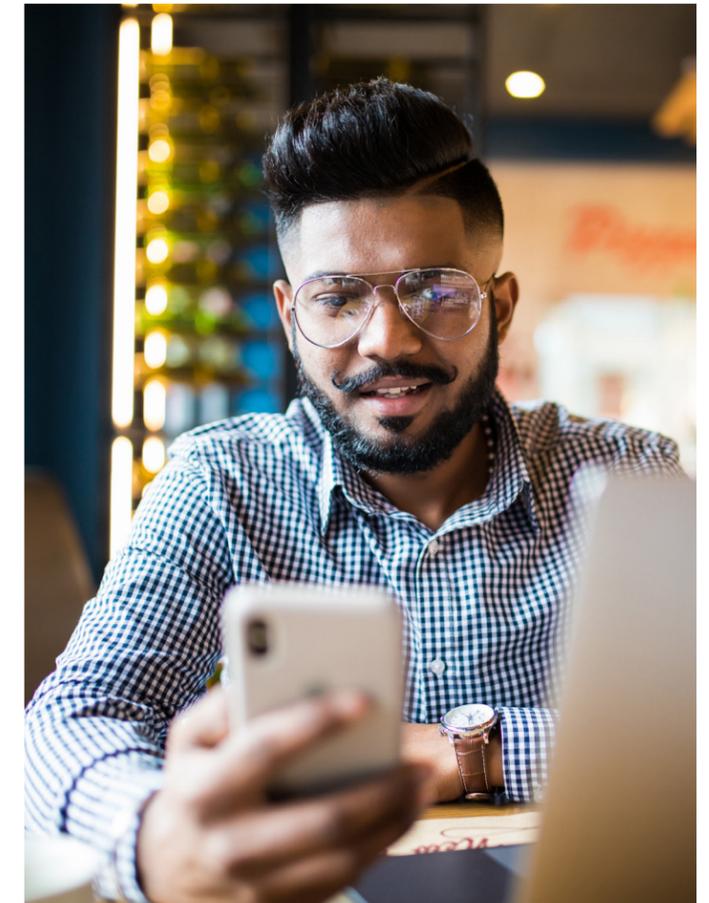
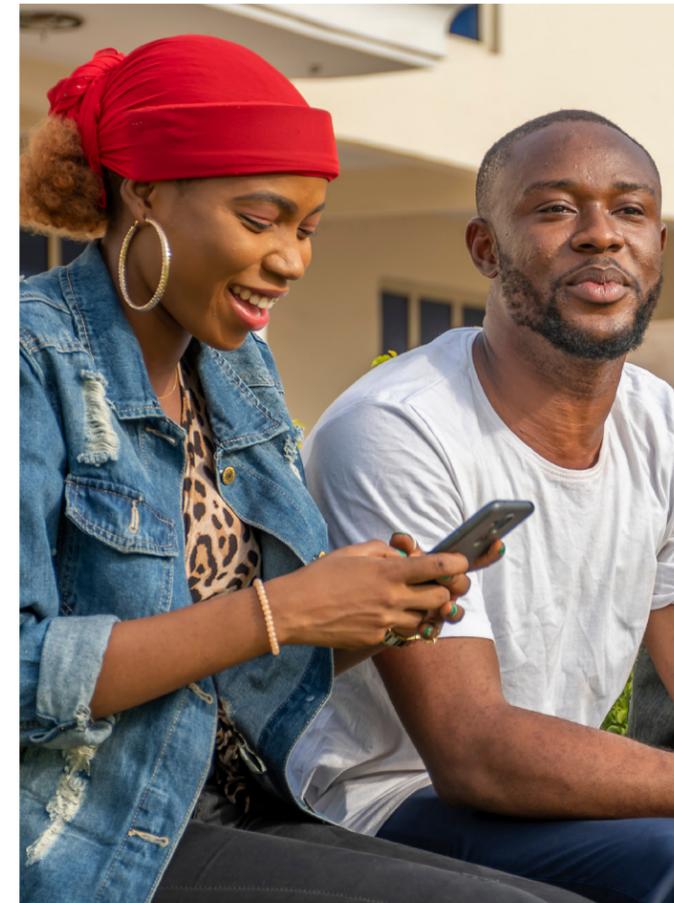




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1 Introduction

The amount of users and time spent on social media is continuing to increase worldwide.

Nearly 5 billion people accessed social media platforms in 2022 and the average user is spending 147 minutes on social media every day.¹

The penetration of the internet in the past twenty years has ushered in a new era of unprecedented connectivity and globalization. The COVID-19 pandemic increased new internet usership by 10% in two years.²

A significant portion of social media users are having meaningful experiences in groups and private channels. Nearly 40% of all social media users, 1.8 billion people, use Facebook groups every month.³ Research from Search for Common Ground has shown that users experience the worst violent content and the most effective responses to it in private groups or in private channels.⁴ In conflict-affected or highly polarized contexts, the worst can be recruitment into violent extremist groups, extortion and intimidation, spreading of hate speech, incitement to violence, and the organization of criminal or violent activities, often triggering spillover effects in the offline world. The best can be building community and solidarity, mobilizing around common interests and social causes, and creating new and positive social norms that empower marginalized voices. These experiences may often lead to on-

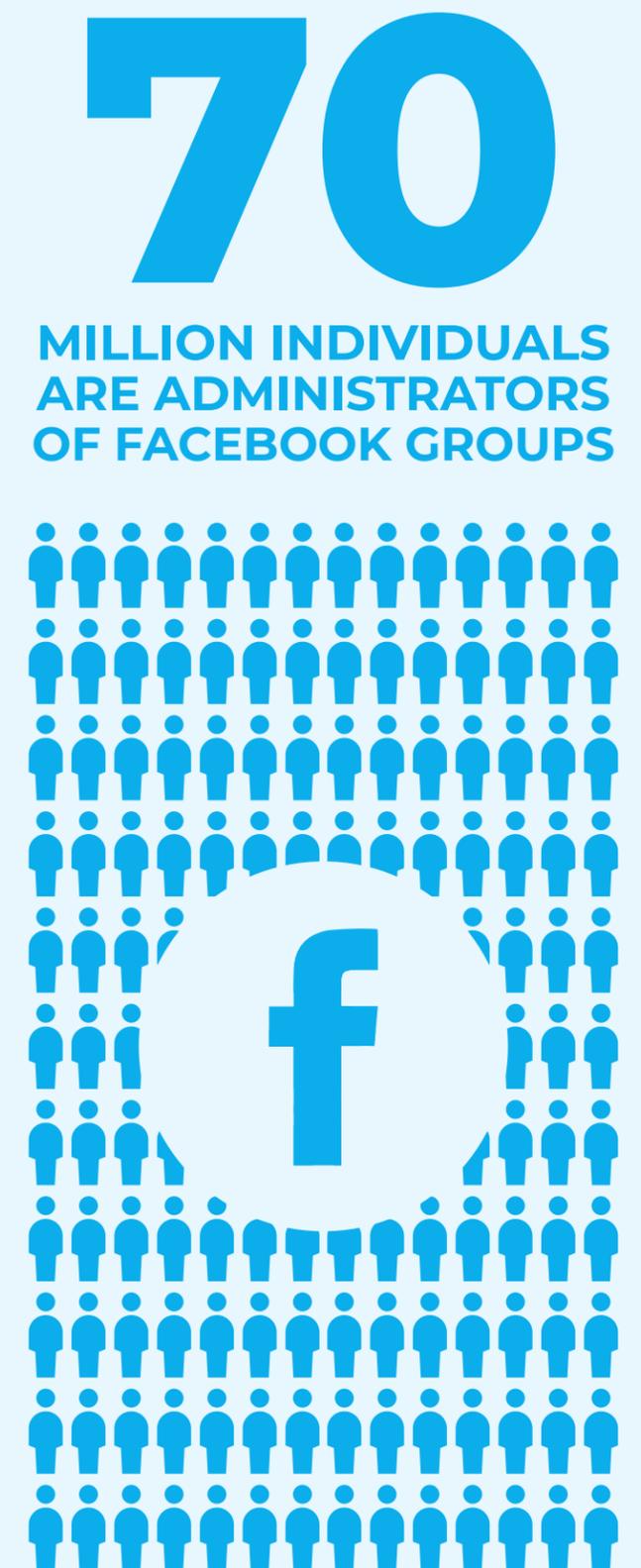
line-to-offline relationships and positive community action. Online communities have become critical in places where or during times when in-person connection is difficult or impossible. This is particularly important and relevant for groups who may belong to minority groups or be otherwise ostracized in their mainstream culture or society.

Since groups play such a big role in user experience, group administrators have unique authority and influence over their members. **There are 70 million individuals who are administrators of Facebook groups.**⁵ Many more coordinate groups across other platforms such as WhatsApp, Signal, and others, which are often run on mobile devices - with a global user base of 5.34 billion unique mobile users.⁶ Group administrators and moderators act as “community stewards.” They are individuals in charge of reviewing user-generated content to ensure users adhere to rules, regulations, and community standards of social media platforms. They hold tremendous influence over the experience of their users, but they often step into these roles without fully understanding the scope of responsibilities they are taking on. Many community stewards describe their role as a “labor of love,” representing a substantial opportunity to catalyze large-scale, positive social change across societies. Yet, they face many challenges. Stewards cite myriad challenges, risks, rewards, and opportunities they face in managing their online groups and pages.⁷

This report focuses on the role of community stewards in promoting healthier relationships in their online and digital groups in conflict-affected and fragile countries. There is growing evidence of the societal impacts stewards are driving through their platforms, such as mobilizing aid during crises, raising awareness on important issues, and fostering solutions to community challenges. Given their unique reach, influence, and trust, community stewards hold great potential to not only mobilize positive social change, but also to foster connection and belonging in a way that positively transforms relationships and disrupts the toxic polarization that divides societies and fuels violence.

The potential of community stewards is clear; it is less clear how civil society, the private sector, governments, and others can best support and scale up this potential. Understanding the needs and incentives of community stewards to proactively use their roles for building healthier online (and offline) communities can help build on what works. Understanding the barriers and challenges they face in doing so, will serve as critical entry points for mobilizing the right support to stewards. This report looks to uncover the barriers and opportunities that stewards face in their efforts to build healthier and safer online communities in conflict-affected and fragile places.

FIGURE 1:



2 Methods & Procedures

MAPPING & PARTICIPANT SELECTION

CRITERIA

Search for Common Ground (Search) defines “community stewards” as individuals who review user-generated content to ensure users adhere to rules, regulations, and community standards of the groups they oversee on social media and digital platforms.

This includes both the community standards and rules of the platforms as well as any rules decided upon by the groups themselves. Community stewards includes administrators and moderators of both public and private groups on various social media platforms (i.e. Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, Twitch, SNAP, Signal, Telegram, etc.). Search further refined the targeting criteria to include community stewards who facilitate and manage social media groups that primarily focus on community welfare and public interest and who increasingly contend with political, conflict-related, or divisive content. The research team hypothesized that community stewards who primarily focus on community welfare and cause-based issues are more likely to have the greatest interest in and potential to cultivate healthier online digital communities, compared to stewards who lead purely interest and hobby-based groups.

Search first conducted a desk review to understand existing research and initiatives that engage, support, and/or assess the role community stewards play in fostering healthier digital spaces. This process also identified any research and knowledge gaps as relevant. Then, the team reached out to stewards through existing networks of Search’s country offices and partner organizations to identify potential participants. Additionally, Search launched a competitive application process among identified stewards to participate in a training alongside this research process while other stewards were solely consulted on the research process. Ultimately, Search identified stewards from 13 different countries, including Cameroon, Egypt, Indonesia, Iraq, Jordan, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Morocco, Nepal, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, and Sri Lanka.



PARTICIPATING COMMUNITY STEWARDS

COME FROM:

Cameroon

Egypt

Indonesia

Iraq

Jordan

Kenya

Kyrgyzstan

Lebanon

Morocco

Nepal

Nigeria

Sierra Leone

Sri Lanka

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Between July and September 2022, Search deployed a number of data collection and engagement tools to capture the needs, incentives, opportunities, and challenges stewards have in building healthier online and digital communities. Search collected both qualitative and quantitative data through a complementary sequencing of pilot training for a select number of stewards, surveys, and focus group discussions. The three day training consisted of nine modules covering topics like promoting inclusion and diversity in online groups, fighting dis/misinformation in your group, and increasing members’ engagement. It was followed by three facilitated online sessions. The training was designed to regularly generate feedback geared towards answering the core research questions, while also testing the efficacy of a new training methodology for stewards. Trained stewards received pre- and post-training surveys, which captured data both relevant to this research as well as additional data related to the training outcomes. Trained community stewards also participated in focus group discussions to generate deeper learning and reflection on the research questions. Community stewards who did not participate in the training, received a survey capturing the same research-related data as the pre-training survey. This report presents the findings and analysis of this research, training, and engagement.

GOING GLOBAL

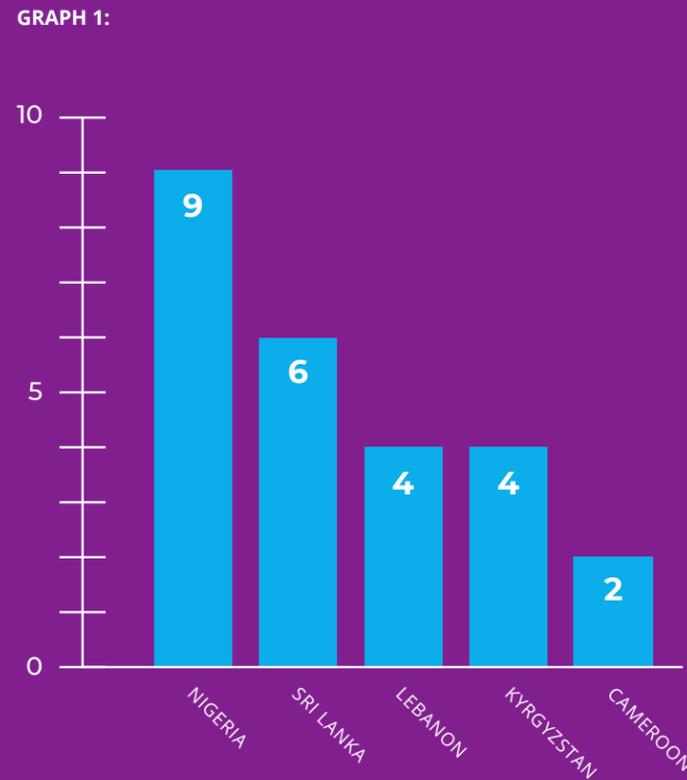
The stewards featured in this report hail from 13 countries around the world, including Cameroon, Egypt, Indonesia, Iraq, Jordan, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Morocco, Nepal, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, and Sri Lanka.

Together, they speak at least 19 unique languages (English, Arabic, French, Russian, Sinhala, Kyrgyz, Tamil, Turkish, Armenian, Bahasa Indonesia, Berom, Ibibio, Persian, and Okun).

The majority of these stewards are below the age of 35 (68%), while a handful are between the ages of 35 and 49 (29%) and only 3% were 50+.

Many stewards speak more than one language—some as many as five. English, Arabic, and French are among the top three languages spoken by participating stewards.

Top 5 Represented Countries Among Community Stewards:



Top 3 Languages Spoken By Participating Stewards:

1. English
2. Arabic
3. French

STRENGTH IN NUMBERS

Most of these stewards manage large groups, with a membership base of 1,000+. Their user data shows that the surveyed respondents steward online groups of at least 95,000 people. Moreover, a significant number of respondents selected multiple ranges, indicating they likely moderate more than one group or use multiple platforms for different iterations of the same group.

WHAT DO THEY DO?

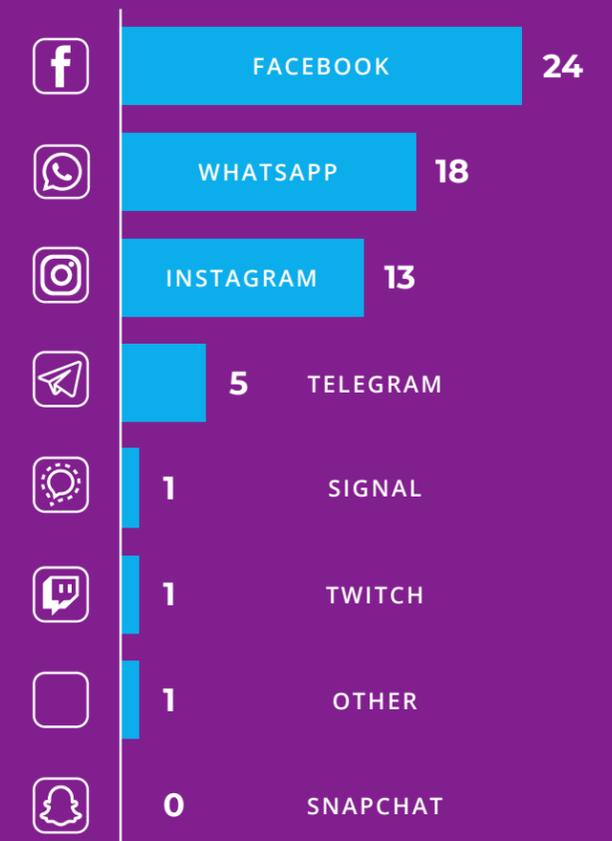
Community stewards operate as moderator and administrator of online and digital groups, playing an oversight role by setting the rules and standards of the group, facilitating group engagement, mobilizing group action, and generating or sharing content. The stewards represented in this research come from a variety of backgrounds, sectors, and experiences, ranging from activists, leaders of civil society organizations, peacebuilders, social workers, journalists, and others. And their groups cover everything from women’s economic empowerment to youth and technology to social justice issues.

WHERE CAN YOU FIND THEM?

Largely, these stewards manage groups on Meta-owned platforms—Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram. However, some also use platforms such as Signal, Twitch, and Telegram. Most respondents selected more than one platform, which could either indicate that they have multiple, distinct groups or that they use multiple platforms for various iterations of the same group.

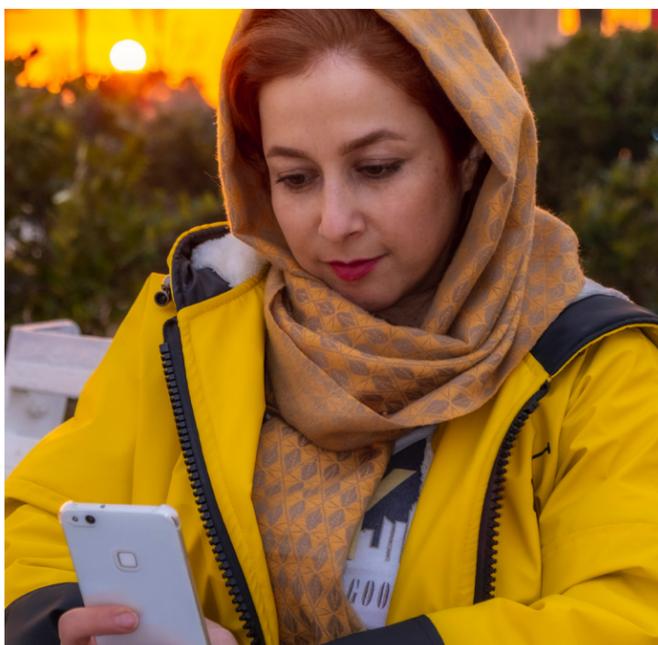
Platforms Used By ALL Respondents For Moderating Groups:

GRAPH 2:



3 Key Findings

The participants had a wide variety of backgrounds, online experience, geographies, and the types and sizes of communities they manage. Despite this, the research shows that stewards actually have many shared experiences and needs for fostering healthier online communities. This section outlines the various needs, incentives, challenges, and opportunities stewards highlighted as key considerations for supporting their ability to foster healthier online and digital communities.



COMMUNITY STEWARDS RECOGNIZE THEIR IMPORTANCE AND INFLUENCE WITH THEIR MEMBERS

Digital leadership is unusually inclusive. Anyone can become a steward with just the click of a button, enabling an uncommonly inclusive process of leadership. However, the path to stewardship is varied and often fast-paced. Many stewards are “voluntold” into their roles or land in “accidental” stewardship positions - often in the wake of emerging crises and social upheavals. Others proactively seek out stewardship, motivated by cause-based issues and personal passions. In all these cases, many stewards do not recognize the full extent of the responsibilities and commitments they are signing up to in managing these groups. Because stewards often come into this role organically, there is little formal support for them about how to succeed in their role and what success looks like.

Yet, stewards recognize the importance of their role. Many stewards see their role as “the next generation of governance in countries.” Societies are increasingly turning to community stewards and groups to address some of the most urgent challenges, capitalizing on the near real-time results and mobilization online groups can generate. They understand that social media and its user bases can transcend national boundaries and operate outside traditional power structures and sociocul-

VIGNETTE 1:



The training helped some stewards realize their potential

Some community stewards participated in a three day in-person training in Dubai in August 2022, followed by three online sessions. The three day training consisted of nine modules covering topics like promoting inclusion and diversity in online groups, fighting dis/misinformation in your group, and increasing members’ engagement. For some, it helped put their role as community steward into perspective.

“I didn’t realize the actual amount of effort and commitment and work that you personally (or I personally) need to put into it to make sure that it’s sustainable or to make sure that you know objectives are achieved. So I think for me, that’s how the perspective has changed about understanding and acknowledging the [stewardship] role and the...power that we have to actually shift perceptions, behaviors and attitudes, in...the world.”

tural norms. A community steward explained,

“When you lead online communities, you will soon understand that it will not remain restricted to certain geographic locations and socioeconomic categories. Online, everyone can join a digital community—not just the people from our country.”

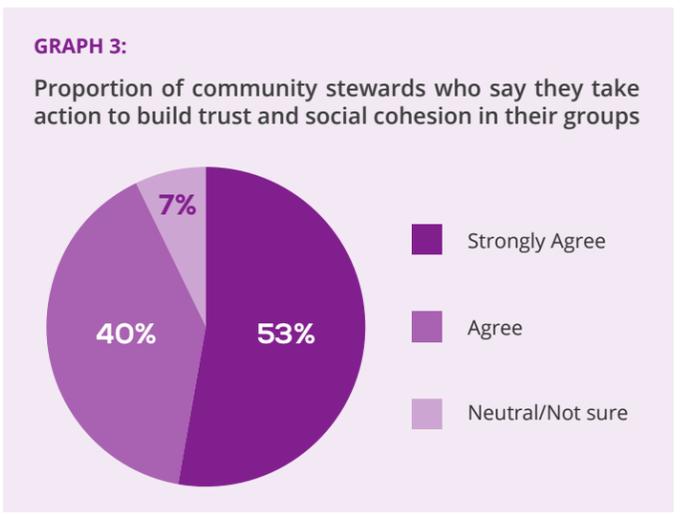
Community stewards identified themselves as changemakers, opportunity catalysts, and leaders. They are largely motivated by personal commitment to advance positive change on issues they care about, shared identity, or collective experience. They are confident in their abilities or potential to fulfill the duties of their role and that they have a positive impact on their members. When asked what online and digital social cohesion means to them, most respondents mentioned ideas about diversity, inclusion, and creating safe spaces for diverse groups and ideas to interact.

Digital community leadership differs from offline roles. One participant explained, “what makes someone a leader in the offline space is completely different from what makes someone a leader on the online space.” Most groups do not have a lot of bureaucracy and so the decisions and leadership of stewards can play a direct and defining role in shaping the experience of the group. Stewards are increasingly using their leadership roles to introduce peacebuilding to a wider group of social media and digital users. One community steward from West Africa described their role as “using digital platforms to build peace” and their goal “to understand and increase a larger percentage of youth using the internet to spread [our] message and create change.”

COMMUNITY STEWARDS BELIEVE IN THEIR OWN ABILITY TO FOSTER SOCIAL COHESION, BUT WANT MORE TOOLS AND SUPPORT TO APPLY THOSE SKILLS IN DIGITAL SPACES.

Building social cohesion within their groups often takes time and intentionality. 93% of respondents say that they take action to build trust and connection within the groups they manage. Stewards see their role to build social cohesion as “supporting a healthy information and communication ecosystem characterized by listening and being responsive to members, enabling freedom of expression, and encouraging members to share ideas.”

They are deploying various tools to build trust with and between their members. They cited strategies such as direct messaging to build one-on-one relationships, taking the time to understand members’ interests and needs, sharing personal stories and connections, and circulating reliable and accurate information and resources. For groups that are more homogenous in nature (i.e. members have the same goals, backgrounds, etc.), generating social cohesion can be easier compared to groups that feature more diversity.

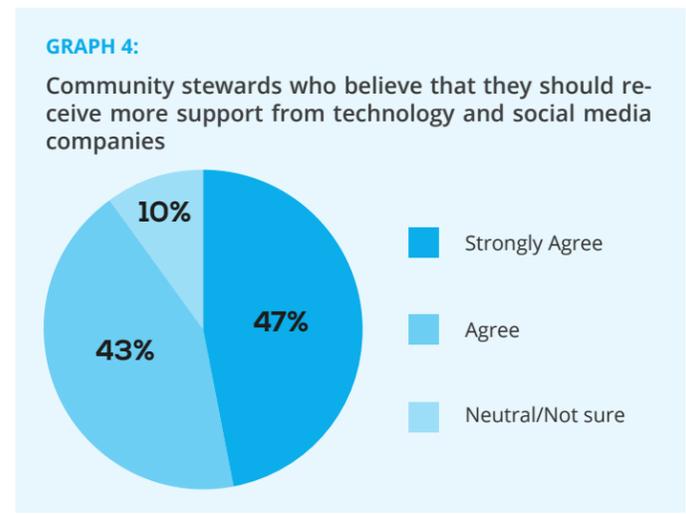


Stewards are already building social cohesion online, but need more support. Stewards recognized that they needed specific tools to lead effectively in a digital space. While 93% percent of stewards believe they have the right skills and knowledge to build trust and connection, only one third believe they have the tools and training to do this effectively with their members. They requested training courses on digital literacy and leadership, as well as mediation, conflict transformation, and communication skills-building that are specifically tailored for digital spaces.

Stewards operate on a currency of trust to foster group cohesion. Maintaining trust in the steward/member relationship, as well as an environment of trust in the group setting is vital to foster healthy information and communication ecosystems. For stewards this means both ensuring accurate information is being shared as well as flagging and moderating information (i.e. misinformation, fake news, etc.) shared in their group settings. Many stewards said that identifying and understanding harmful information are among the most important skills for their role as stewards. One steward commented,

“Probably the [social media] service providers including Meta and others should look deeply into what support they are willing to give so that digital community stewards can make use of the platform better...For instance when you open a group, there could be a space you enter that teaches you how to actually manage a group, what triggers to look out for hate speech, misinformation, [and] disinformation, so they can learn how to spot fake news, to make things a little easier for moderators and admins.”

While 93% of stewards believe they have the right skills and knowledge to build trust and connection, only one third believe they have the tools and training to do this effectively with their members.



When asked what will increase their motivation or willingness to build trust and connection online and within the groups they manage, many stewards mentioned engagement and support from other stewards. Increased peer-to-peer support and engagement would not only respond to the needs and incentives of stewards to have access to this kind of engagement, but would also serve as a critical opportunity to enhance their collective impact, viability, and confidence. Indeed, stewards themselves are likely best placed to identify innovative solutions to the challenges they are facing. For instance, they might come up with creative models for mobilizing surge support to help overburdened or new stewards. Some stewards said a “global community of fellow stewards” would be motivating, while others highlighted that steward-to-steward support can address the gaps and needs stewards feel when first creating their groups. Others suggested that technology and social media companies “create a direct helpline with the company” for stewards to access when they need to report or prioritize support from the platform.

BAD ACTORS AND GROUP TENSIONS CAN UNDERMINE STEWARDS’ LEADERSHIP AND TRUST.

Trust is the primary currency of an effective steward. Stewards reported that without the trust of their members, they risk group exodus, dormancy, or “rebellion.” Digital disruptors derail stewards’ attempts to foster trust and build relationships. They pose regular challenges and threats to an already-fragile trust ecosystem in many groups. Stewards shared numerous instances when they lost the trust of members at the hands of bots and actors looking to disrupt the functioning of their

group. One steward in Central Asia shared,

“We were working on a campaign to support a president and many bots came and destroyed all of our progress. There was hate speech and inappropriate comments, and people after reading these comments changed their minds based on what the bots were saying. The bots are playing a big role in our society.”

Once the trust was lost, the stewards found it nearly impossible to regain it.

Stewards also discussed the difficulties of “fact checking” and removing posts in their groups that members flagged as misinformation. Moreover, one steward mentioned the problem of “double agents,” where bad actors create fake profiles and secretly join groups meant for minorities or vulnerable groups, and later expose individuals’ identities on other platforms - encouraging harassment or other attacks. These issues often result in both online and offline safety concerns for these members. When asked how technology and social media companies and platforms can better support the needs of community stewards, the majority of respondents suggested that social media companies should have increased tools for the management and oversight of harmful information and behaviors.

Over half of the surveyed stewards felt that conflict and tensions among group members are uncommon; but the responses suggest they are difficult to manage when they do come up. Many noted needing conflict resolution, moderation, and non-violent communication skills to manage the conflicts. Many stewards feel they lack the capacity to manage content and conversations, which presents challenges when members share

inappropriate, insensitive, or harmful content. In some instances, the inability to remove harmful content led to a loss of membership.

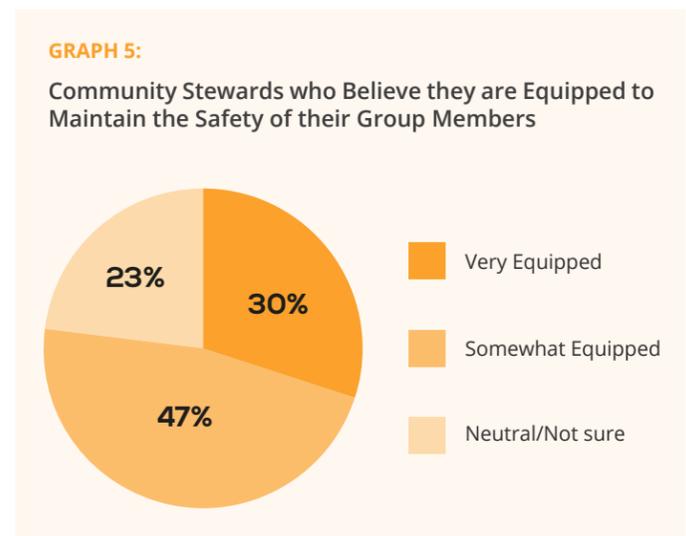
Those who have engaged in offline peacebuilding work are inclined to bring those techniques into their online engagement, but those skills do not always translate. One respondent referred to the difficulty of managing conflict solely through online devices. They recognized that they need a deeper understanding of algorithms and must master digital applications in order to maintain online social cohesion and strengthen their roles. Other stewards mentioned that hybrid online-offline approaches enable more effective outcomes as community stewards experienced better support and more effects through offline mobilization.

MORE THAN HALF OF COMMUNITY STEWARDS FEEL UNDER-EQUIPPED TO PROMOTE A SAFE AND POSITIVE EXPERIENCE FOR THEIR MEMBERS.

Stewards want more options and privileges to protect the safety and privacy of their users. They see themselves as “safety providers” and this duty motivates them to remain engaged in their stewardship role. But, they do worry about their ability to promote safety and maintain positive messaging for their members. Amongst those who partook in the training, less than half the stewards (47%) felt that they were equipped enough to promote safety. For instance, one steward reported that a member of a group with an opposing position joined their group. That person then collected and disseminated the member list of their group to another online group, which then used it as a list for online targeting and harassment. Other community stewards felt they were unable

to protect their users, because they had limited access to platform management tools to remove sensitive content or to maintain privacy for all their members.

Stewards mentioned that promoting a safe environment needs to go beyond stewards alone. Secondary administrators, group members, and the broader social media community need coaching and training on digital literacy to enhance their overall confidence to engage productively and alleviate some of the demands on stewards. For instance, stewards often face additional pressures when their support administrators do not feel confident enough to take action without oversight from the primary steward.



Stewards want more resources on how to cultivate a positive experience for their users. Stewards highlighted that personal engagement and dedication is not sufficient but that “there’s actually a science and an art to it,” as one respondent shared. There are many resources available to stewards on the relevance of choosing one platform for a given purpose and content, how to create a group, and how to foster engagement.

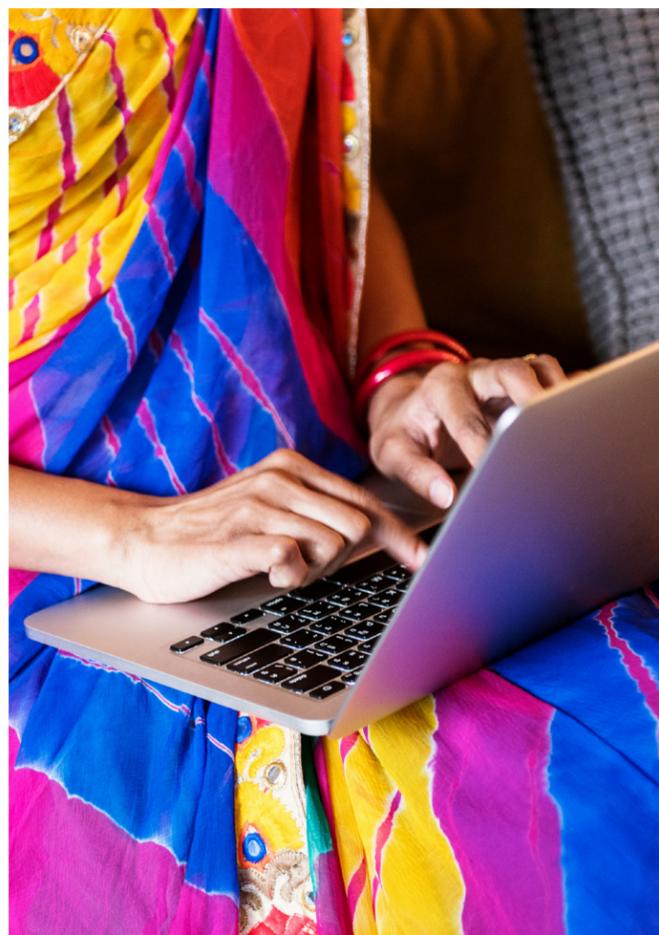
However, there are very few resources on “how to be a good steward” or “how to create a safe and trusting digital space.”

TIME CONSTRAINTS, INCREASING DEMANDS, AND LACK OF MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT CONTRIBUTE TO STEWARD BURNOUT AND POOR PSYCHO-SOCIAL WELL BEING.

The time demands of community stewardship limit stewards’ ability to effectively manage issues in their groups and affect their personal wellbeing. Stewards recognize the complexity of their duties and that it requires multitasking abilities while facing time constraints and the social pressures of fast-growing groups. Many enter into this role unprepared for the time consuming nature of “doing the job well.”

Surges in membership or member activity increase reliance on stewards and generate greater pressure for them to “perform” their roles. Community stewards regularly face rapid growth, surges in group activity, and escalating tensions between members that can quickly become unmanageable. Many expressed the need to be responsive in near-real time or else they easily lose track of engagement. Their inability to keep pace in these instances jeopardizes their credibility as leaders and undermines their ability to maintain group control, oversight, and safety. Encouraging or monitoring group social cohesion in these times is challenging. Stewards requested updated resources and tools to help them generate automatic responses, have stricter controls for managing content and discussions, and tactics for managing rapid growth effectively as important for overcoming these challenges.

Stewards noted the psychological burden, burnout, and challenges associated with many of the sensitive topics and issues they oversee in their groups. Members tend to turn to stewards as a resource for dealing with traumas and other urgent challenges, yet stewards lack the technical skills and tools to effectively manage these situations. Regular exposure to these dynamics creates risks for secondary trauma and other emotional and psychological wellbeing concerns. One steward recognized that this is likely going to increase in coming years, “I think in the coming years people are going to be more vulnerable, more people will feel frustrated, and will seek out [support on digital] platforms. So the responsibility on stewards’ shoulders is going to increase.”



VIGNETTE 2:



Stewards have few resources to contend with surging membership

In Sri Lanka, a post about youth economic empowerment went viral in the midst of the ongoing economic crisis. The viral post generated demands for the creation of a group, which surged to more than 9,000 members, thrusting this particular steward into a new set of responsibilities without the needed support, resources, or skills.

The efforts stewards are investing into content moderation are contributing to their burnout. Stewards’ manually decide whether to remove content or not from the groups and they lack access to digital tools that could help decipher bots and mis/disinformation. The discussions reveal that there are few places to go for stewards when they need help or guidance. Half of the respondents stated they need more or different support, resources, and tools to manage their own personal wellbeing and safety. Some stewards mentioned they looked for partnerships with experts, such as therapists and other organizations outside of their group, to provide in-kind support and engagement with members.

Half of the respondents stated they need more or different support, resources, and tools to manage their own personal wellbeing and safety.

VIGNETTE 3:



Community stewards regularly face emotional stress and retraumatization when dealing with sensitive topics

Half of stewards believed they did not have the right support, resources, and tools to manage their own personal wellbeing and safety.

“As a person with trauma, it is hard for me to listen to all of these people’s miseries. And especially for me to work for a peacebuilding organization, seeing a lot of hate speech and intolerant speech and discrimination”

“Outside of my bigger aspirations for this work, I think I also have a personal/sentimental value as well. I grew up in a violent environment with an abusive family. I feel like I have witnessed and felt fear, sadness and violence. Inside me, there is a growing feeling that I do not want to see people getting sad/feeling hurt. And I want to help”

Most stewardship positions are unpaid, yet demands on stewards’ time and commitments surge over time. Particularly in low-income and fragile contexts, unpaid labor is not a viable option for the quality and sustainable management of their groups. A few participants raised the idea of “monetizing” their time spent moderating. Other stewards highlighted the need to share leadership and administration responsibilities, not only for time management but also to fill gaps in skills. But in their attempts to fill these gaps, finding voluntary, unpaid support is difficult. One steward proposed, *“...a system for recognizing these groups, if there were grants, or funds – even if they are not necessarily aligned to an NGO, but if they are doing something that matters and has promise in terms of building communities. Being able to monetize and incentivize teams that are [in] those groups could help them prioritize their time towards those groups, to ensure the group quality.”*

SEEING IMPACT FROM THEIR WORK MOTIVATES STEWARDS.

Many stewards feel incentivized when their online engagement translates into positive offline engagement. This kind of engagement can range from mobilizing community action to solve a problem; to creating smaller WhatsApp groups for coordinating local meet-ups; to one-on-one interactions that translate into offline, mutual support and comradery. Stewards shared examples of how their online engagement contributed to positively shifting

VIGNETTE 4:



Timely reaction and recognition of online community members is what keeps stewardship’s role alive and impactful

“And what motivates me, when boys and girls come to us and thank us, for providing a safe space. They post “maybe you read this, but I am following you, and it is changing my life because of what you are doing”, and when I read these posts, this is what motivates me. And when we receive these messages, I share it with the volunteers, and it motivates them as well.”

offline behaviors of non-members, while others shared examples of how offline influences can undermine group goals.

Stewards want tools for better monitoring and evaluating the impact of their work to reinforce their motivation, ranging from basic training on data analytics to more advanced tools to capture the reach of their impact. And while the majority of stewards feel confident they know how to measure membership engagement data and insights on the platform they are managing, a sizable block, nearly 40%, do not.

Many community stewards feel it is important to receive recognition from social media and technology companies themselves. Automated messages, badges, and other “rewards” are important for building morale. Moreover, being selected to participate in in-person trainings can foster a sense of recognition, support, and importance.

STEWARDS FIND THAT ONLINE-TO-OFFLINE ENGAGEMENT GENERATES GREATER IMPACT.

Merging online and offline interaction provides particular gratification for stewards. They believe offline engagement reinforces and strengthens bonds made online and deepens interpersonal relationships. Hybrid engagement also aids in building group trust, particularly when addressing sensitive topics. One steward shared, “Group members expressed to me that it is helpful to come together in an offline space. Many of the participants would like to come together in an offline space since many of the issues they are talking about are sensitive,” while another said that, “when the community engages in person, there’s a higher level of trust.”

There is an intimate connection between online and offline worlds, both of which are constantly influencing the other. Stewards shared examples of how their online engagement contributed to positively shifting offline behaviors of non-members, while others shared examples of how offline influences can undermine group goals. For instance, one participant highlighted, “Because we are helping teenagers, they are talking to their parents, changing their parents’ mindset, and those parents have become our allies.” Training participants reflected on the importance of attending the training in-person to generate connections, ideas, and collaboration that would otherwise be missed in a virtual setting.



4 Recommendations

There are various ways of building the confidence of community stewards, whether through technical training, networking opportunities, or by making their contributions more visible to the global community.

Stewards particularly emphasized the needs to address the constant pressure and risk of burnout, especially for those operating in conflict affected contexts. This final section provides recommendations to better invest in, support, and recognize online community stewardship for social cohesion.

1. CREATE TOOLS TO EASE THE MANAGEMENT BURDENS OF STEWARDSHIP IN “SURGE” MOMENTS.

The data shows that stewards often struggle to keep up with the management and moderation demands of their roles. These needs are particularly acute in “surge” moments when membership or activity spikes in their groups or pages. Tech solutions that assist stewards to manage these moments would alleviate some of the pressures they face.

- Onboard stewards with more resources to set them up for success. This could include a dashboard of controls to manage content, or click through tutorials on how to manage potential conflicts that are triggered by group moderation alerts.

- Create bots that are activated when membership or activity surges over a certain threshold based on group size/historical activity. These bots could prompt stewards with resources, FAQs, connection with more experienced stewards for peer support, or online training modules.

2. MAKE REAL-TIME TECH SOLUTIONS TO HANDLE HARMFUL CONTENT AVAILABLE TO STEWARDS.

Stewards see themselves as “safety providers” for the members of their groups, but content moderation takes a toll on their time and well being. They desire more tools to provide protection and a positive experience to their users.

- Utilize bots or algorithms that help to group together flagged posts along a certain theme, so that they can be jointly responded to. As well as dashboard controls/filters that allow stewards to sort posts based on keywords or engagement criteria.
- Provide additional options besides ignore or remove content. For instance, adding the option to add “trigger warnings” or colors to potentially provocative or controversial materials. Or creating options for moderators to tag posts, messages, or comments as “under review” while stewards scrutinize the content.

- Share learning and established tech solutions, such as machine learning for misinformation, to stewards to help identify potential misinformation or inflammatory posts.
- Add the ability to have another layer of authenticity verification for users, such as requiring phone numbers or security questions to enter groups, to help limit fake accounts or bots.
- Create a verification process that allows groups or pages to certify their legitimacy.

3. EQUIP STEWARDS WITH THE SKILLS AND OPPORTUNITIES TO CREATE HEALTHY ONLINE ENVIRONMENTS AND PROTECT THEIR OWN WELLBEING.

Stewards recognize that cultivating trust is paramount to the success of their groups. While stewards believe they have the skills to cultivate trust, they struggle with the right tools to build this atmosphere in their online spaces.

- Invest in community steward training that equips participants with skills to foster inclusion and diversity, build trust, address dis/misinformation, and manage internal conflicts online.
- Support a global peer-to-peer support community of fellow stewards. This could allow for informal mentorship, knowledge sharing, and solutioning to common challenges faced by stewards on a particular platform.
- Host webinars/virtual town halls/AMAs with trained experts (e.g. therapists, lawyers, mediators, etc.) about how to handle the personal and professional burdens of digital community stewardship. If a peer-to-peer network existed, this could be a feature of the community.

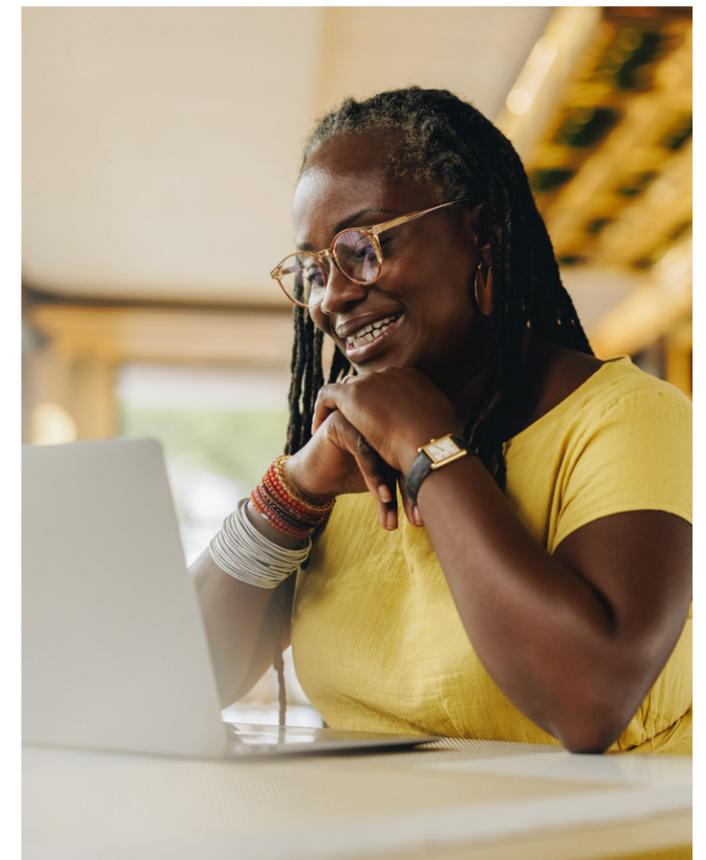
4. RECOGNIZE AND EMPOWER DIGITAL LEADERSHIP.

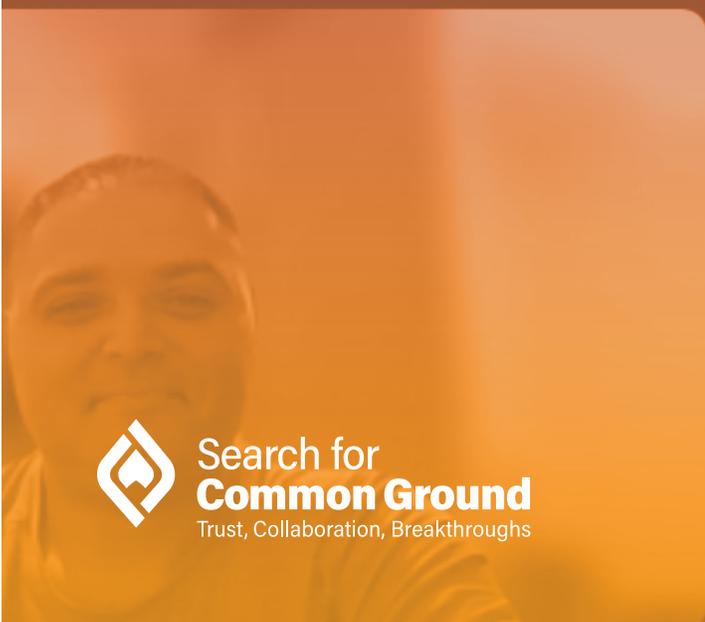
Many of the stewards continue their role because they see themselves as shaping the online and offline world around them through this role. Recognizing this contribution can validate the time and resources invested by stewards and encourage them to pursue opportunities to continually improve their stewardship.

- Explore ways to recognize stewards who undertake steps to improve and create healthy online spaces. This could look like automated recognition, such as badges to commemorate months/years of service in a role, or areas to list online facilitation certifications that can be displayed or linked to users’ profiles. Another example could be “facilitator of the year” competitions to showcase the dedication and meaningful contributions of stewards and help pave the way for additional sources of compensation (awards, prizes, fellowships, etc.) that recognize outstanding stewardship.
- Consider a “Year in Review” highlight reel that summarizes the activities, engagement, and accomplishments of the group to its users.
- Include community stewards in stakeholder mapping analyses and engage them as meaningful partners for peace and conflict programs. Community stewards are important leaders with wide scopes of influence. They have a good understanding of important issues in their communities that are critical to a full understanding of the issues at hand.

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