



## Virtual and Interest-Based Communities

By John Creighton

Communities of place bound by geography are just one type of community you might cover. Increasingly, people choose to be parts of communities of interest and virtual communities that aren't limited by time and place.

The Harwood Institute's frameworks on [Types of Community Leaders](#) and [Layers of Civic Life](#) were first developed around geographic communities. Today, they also offer insights for covering virtual and interest-based communities.

These frameworks suggest how you can think about the different ways people exercise leadership, and the different types of forums where people talk about community issues. These are key to community reporting.

The idea that people demonstrate leadership in a variety of ways – not just when making official decisions – applies in every type of community. For instance, people who host and facilitate a virtual community are one type of leader. Those who participate in that online community can take on roles similar to roles played in geographic communities: Some members of a virtual community, for instance, become “unofficial” experts and become the [catalysts](#).

When you write about a virtual or interest-based community, consider the different ways people exercise leadership and how different leaders offer different perspectives.

The same holds true for [layers of civic life](#). In virtual or interest-based communities, the “official” forums for decision-making and dialogue are just one dimension of community life. It's equally important to find and cover the spaces where people are having informal conversations.

Every community is different. But this is what's important: Community life plays out on many different levels with many different people playing leadership roles.

Some layers of community life and leaders are easily seen. Just as often, however, you'll need to get out there and find them.