



Prepared by :

URI North America,  
with thanks to  
Interfaith America

# Interfaithfully Connected

A guide on using the internet  
for interfaith cooperation



# About The Toolkit

In 2022, URI North America received a grant to review and provide feedback on the [#Interfaith curriculum](#), written by Interfaith America. The goal of the curriculum is to engage "a new generation of leaders who understand the power of the Internet, appreciate how it can be used to promote understanding across lines of difference, and are fully trained to maximize the impact of the technology for the common good.

"We are producers and not consumers, and there's a responsibility that comes with that and a set of competencies we need to learn."

To extend the knowledge and impact of this curriculum, several members of various Cooperation Circles in North America, as well as members of various communities and sectors, came together to develop a short guide that allows individuals and communities to think about the work they do online, the challenges that often come with digital engagement, the role of our traditions and value systems as we use the Internet, and provides you with resources to develop skills that help you navigate digital platform as users and facilitators.

*We're immensely thankful to the Cooperation Circle members who offered insight in wisdom to make the feedback process, and this toolkit, possible:*

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# Guiding Questions

As you look through the guide, think about the following questions and how they impact the way you do work online:

- How does your religious, spiritual, indigenous, or secular worldview inform how you navigate the internet?
- How do you engage the differences in worldview and point of view in online spaces?
- What tools do you use to create community? How do you find them useful and how could they improve?
- How have you dealt with scenarios that have led to disagreements or harsh exchanges between individuals?
- Have you ever come across misinformation, disinformation, or misinformation? Do you know the difference between those terms?
- In spaces where information is rapidly shared, how do you work to keep people informed and updated about what's going on?

# Introduction



**The internet is a space for the people to thrive and build communities in ways unimaginable.**

The World Bank and Insider Intelligence estimate that 57-60% of the global population, or a population of at least 4.5 billion people, use the Internet in 2022. That is a staggering number who engage with the virtual space daily for work, leisure, and for the opportunity to connect with others all over the world. When we complement that with increasing concerns over conflicts and disasters, it's no wonder that people turn to the internet to keep themselves updated with what's going on. Grassroots communities and the interfaith movement at large are no exception.



**The internet is a powerful tool for the interfaith movement, but we must choose to use it for good.**

Our work to establish cultures of peace, justice, and healing requires us to build the skills necessary to engage in dialogue, reconciliation, and collaboration online. This doesn't mean we haven't come across a disagreement between loved ones, a misleading post about a current event, or even the occasional technological gap that makes using social media platforms so important these days. We've made this toolkit as a guide to think about the ways that your worldview informs how world wide web while developing strategies to improve and amplify your online engagement

# Activity: What is my "Net"work?



**We use so many different programs to communicate with people, and all networks are not made equal.**

Take out a sheet of paper and think about your communication work. What do you use to do the following activities? **Keep in mind that there is no right or wrong answer, just YOUR answer;** you may write the same answer multiple times because some platforms can be used in various ways. This includes social media, emails, video chatting, and any other online applications that come to mind.

What do you use to:

- Share information about events, updates, and reports in your network?
- Share media like audio messages, pictures, and videos?
- Create visual content about events and projects (graphics)?
- Contact people immediately about something (like calls, text messages, etc.)?
- Contact people over time (like emails, scheduled calls, text chats, etc.)?
- Create space for discussion and reflection (like online forums)?

Think about all of the programs and platforms you've used for each of these activities:

- Do you use any of these apps for a specific purpose or do they provide multiple tools in your work for online engagement?
- Do you find it useful to use different programs that may very well do the same thing (to make it easier to meet people where they're at) or do you use a program already that does the job of engaging as many people as possible (so you don't have to repeat the process constantly?)
- Are you looking for specific things that can help you with the communication work that you don't already have?

These questions are meant to help to consider the best use of your time, energy, and resources when you think about connecting with people online so we know that you're effective in your outreach.

# Keeping up with "The News"



**How do you keep yourself informed and how do you know that the information you're reading is accurate?**

Articles, social media posts, videos, and Google searches are the most common ways that individuals use the internet to stay up to date about the latest things happening in local, regional, and international affairs. We often base the validity of information based on the source of reporting or information collection as well as the people that we trust who can share information that is true with us. It's important to consider the following when reading through information to determine its validity:

## Bias

Each of us has a lens that sees the world based on our upbringing, knowledge base, and experiences that help us to make informed observations and decisions. Biases, although normal, can impact the way that we process the information; we don't want to affirm the information about a subject matter only because it affirms a point of view or "side" to be taken on a matter.

It's important that you verify these sources of information to the best of your ability, so think about the following steps you can take to make sure that any information you read and share is supported by the most up-to-date, relevant, and factual information available. Use the following questions and best practices to support you as you review any piece of information that comes your way:

**- *Where did you find this information?***

Did you find this information on your own or did a friend, colleague, or online acquaintance share this information with you? Do you agree with their understanding of an issue or know them to access information from reputable sources?

**- *Is this a reputable source?***

Is the information you're reading or watching based on first-hand accounts, researched processes, or possible hearsay? It's important to confirm this because often allegations and conspiracy theories are shared as equivalent talking points to that of news reports or medical studies.

**- *Does your source of information have a particular bias?***

Often we note that biases can determine things like political leaning and views on a specific issue or cause. It's important to understand that in spaces that can offer and confirm biases, you still have an opportunity to differentiate between facts and fiction. Ad Fontes Media offers an important resource called the [Media Bias Chart](#) which has reviewed over 2,000 digital sources of information from news agencies, to blogs and special interest websites that share content about people, events, or issues that are covered in the media at large.

**- *What are the implications of posting this information?***

We turn to Principles 5 and 9 of the URI Charter to answer this question:

- We listen and speak concerning deepening mutual understanding and trust.
- We practice healing and reconciliation to resolve conflict without resorting to violence.

As you inform and educate others about issues that are relevant to the work of your Cooperation Circle, we invite you to be mindful of the spaces in which you share this information and the consequences that can result from exchanges that take place in response to the information you share. In spaces where disagreement can exacerbate, it's important that you take various perspectives into account while also centering empirical, accurate information between stakeholders in a conversation.

# The "Truth" of the Matter



**Outside of biases, how can you tell that something is true? How do you handle work through differentiating between the truth and misinformation/disinformation?**

When we work to address points of contention in online spaces, you'll note how people may often share information or their own opinions about a subject as the absolute truth. In a world where we must acknowledge the nuance of an issue, it's important to give space for both the accuracy of the information that is presented and the validity of people's experiences when bringing people for a common cause.

## 4 Different Kinds of Truth

The Human Systems Dynamics Institute presents a model of understanding the larger notion of truth by creating a space to consider the different kinds of truth that coexist:

- Objective Truth is what exists and can be proved in this physicality. (The sun moves across the sky each day.)
- Normative Truth is what we, as a group, agree is true. (English speakers agreed to use the word day to name that time when the sky is lit by the sun.)
- Subjective Truth is how the individual sees or experiences the world. (Today is a good day for me.)
- Complex Truth recognizes the validity of all those truths and allows you to focus on the one is most useful at any given time. (The sun is up; the day is bright. Today is a good day for MOM, so lets take advantage of that and ask for ice cream for dinner.)



*Consider this: Think of an argument or debate that has broken out recently between friends, loves ones, or colleagues. Were you able to note these various truths mentioned above? How does a complex truth help you navigate through conflict and reach a resolution?*

## **Misinformation and Disinformation**

The advent of the internet and its ability to help us communicate has also given rise to conspiracy theories and rumored information that spread like wildfire. A few key terms to address in this context relate to the intention and the style in which false information spreads. These definitions by the UNHCR help provide some clarity:

- Misinformation is false or inaccurate information. Examples include rumors, insults, and pranks. *Example: You tell Rafael that the team has a meeting at 10 AM but it's a surprise party for his birthday.*
- Disinformation is deliberate and includes malicious content such as hoaxes, spear phishing, and propaganda. It spreads fear and suspicion among the population. *Example: X ethnic community is the reason Y happened because they believe in Z, therefore we should discriminate against them.*

*In the context of how information is exchanged and how discussions are had, it's essential to differentiate between the four different kinds of truth and complete falsehood. Real stories, experiences, and empirical evidence should always take precedence when addressing concerns or determining the solutions to any scenario.*

To learn more about the impact of misinformation and disinformation, check out this episode of [Last Week Tonight with John Oliver](#) to learn about the ways in which misinformation and disinformation have been making an impact around the world.

The #Interfaith curriculum by Interfaith America also has some great information about this, both as modules and in PDF form: <https://www.interfaithamerica.org/curricula/interfaith-digital/>