

Membership FAQs

CONNECTIVE TISSUE

Membership Overview & FAQs

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A Quick Note:

At *Connective Tissue*, we take membership seriously. So seriously, in fact, that we just wrote up a 13-page FAQ to help you consider whether you should join *our* new membership. While you're welcome to read this document in full, we also encourage you to jump around and follow where your curiosity takes you. If you have any questions that are not addressed here, please [send us a note](#) and we'll add them. Thanks so much for your belief in what we're doing with *Connective Tissue*, and for your interest in potentially becoming a member!

- Sam

Primary FAQs

What are we doing?

We're launching a self-sustaining, self-governing membership network to collectively realize our generational project of civic and communal renewal.

Connective Tissue membership is for community-builders, policymakers, neighbors, funders, and thinkers who aren't satisfied with the status quo. Our members want to imagine, experiment with, and work toward new models for revenue and governance, new approaches for organizing and participation, and new ways of being for showing up in community. And our members want to connect with, support, learn from, and be inspired by their fellow members.

We're envisioning *Connective Tissue* membership as an integrated digital and IRL model (think [Strong Towns](#), but for civic and communal renewal). Our initial digital offerings will include interactive events, a member database and member-developed resources, and a monthly curated list of top reads. Our IRL offerings will include an annual gathering, regional/local member groups, and live events with partners. All of this is a work-in-progress pilot, and membership is an active experience. Members will be expected to shape the future direction of their membership — both by participating in member committees and leading elements of the member experience.

Consider reading through these FAQs to learn more about *Connective Tissue* members. And when you're ready to become a *Connective Tissue* member, make it official by [paying your dues](#).

Why are we doing it? Why now?

Entering a New Phase

Connective Tissue has been a labor of love for almost two years. We spend 10-15 hours per week on the newsletter, and we're (usually) quite proud of the quality of what we publish. We're also grateful that what we're putting out is resonating: Since last July, our subscriber count has [grown by 5x](#) (from ~1,000 to ~5,000), a few of our pieces [have gone viral\(ish\)](#), and subscribers have [started experimenting](#) with our [proposed ideas](#) for strengthening civic life.

What started as a little experiment to “[learn out loud](#)” while we were developing the [Connective Tissue Policy Framework](#) is now shaping policy, culture, and practice around renewing civic life, both in America and abroad. It's become clear to us that

Connective Tissue is entering a new phase. But what exactly should this next phase look like?

Upon reflection, we quickly realized the answer should involve an orientation toward self-sustainability. Yes, a self-sustaining model would support the 10+ hours/week of work we put into writing *Connective Tissue*. Yes, it would allow us to maintain editorial independence. But most importantly, it would give us an opportunity to [practice what we preach](#) around civic alignment, challenging us to create our own aligned business and governance model.

Learning from Subscribers

Once we decided on building a self-sustaining model, the question became: “How, exactly?” We figured our subscribers might have the answer. Throughout May, we conducted interviews with our highly engaged subscribers to get a sense of what they found valuable and differentiated about *Connective Tissue*’s current offerings, and what else we could do to meet their needs and aspirations (You can find a synthesis of these interviews [here](#)).

These interviews clarified our direction. Time and again, we heard that subscribers loved the quality of our content, but didn’t want more of it (newsletter fatigue is real). Instead, what subscribers wanted more than anything was the opportunity to meet and cultivate relationships with other subscribers — and, ideally, they wanted to do this in-person. Perhaps it’s not surprising that membership — the very thing we’ve written so much about — is also what our subscribers wanted us to create.

Putting Membership into Practice

The *Connective Tissue* member experience that we’re now rolling out is our opportunity to put our theories of membership into practice. We’re going to learn what it takes to actually build a self-sustaining revenue model through membership. We’re going to experiment with different approaches to self-governance and member participation in decision-making. And we’re going to see if we can translate a digital network into local, IRL membership. Through it all, we’ll continue making adjustments and sharing our learnings of the good and bad along with the fun, boring, messy, and weird.

Who is membership for?

What brings us together

We believe we’re at the start of a generational moment of civic renewal. We’ve begun to articulate our vision for what this moment asks of us in recent pieces like “[How](#)

[cities can cultivate a sense of membership](#),” [“Beyond Bob](#),” [“We’ve squeezed the ‘life’ out of civic life](#),” and [“A New American Awakening](#).” Undergirding these pieces is a set of shared principles for seeding a new civic paradigm, which we expect most of our members will feel (mostly) aligned with:

- **Proximate:** Committed to strengthening community and civic life in particular places through proximate leadership and networked, lateral approaches to scale (rather than national, top-down approaches).
- **Participatory:** Treat residents as community “members” deserving of full participation in all facets of civic life — from programs, to leadership, to governance — not “clients” to be “served” or “managed.”
- **Relational:** Center the inherent value of relationships as ends in and of themselves — not instrumental means toward other ends — embracing a more reciprocal, emergent, and relational approach to community-building.
- **Generational:** Approach the work of civic renewal on a generational time scale — not a “problem” to be “solved” in 1, 3, or 5 years — and commit to building the business, governance, and operating models to last for the long haul.
- **Spiritual:** See the work of cultivating relationships and a renewed civic life as an inherently sacred and spiritual project — one that defies categorization, control, and materiality.

What we’re not about

Just as there are shared principles that bring us together, there are also certain things that our membership is explicitly not about. We outline a few of the big ones here, all of which have come up in our past interactions with subscribers:

- **Partisan:** We believe what we’re writing about for *Connective Tissue* is pre-political. So too is the work we’re hoping to advance through our membership. If you’re looking for a place to connect and organize around national political issues, there are other groups for that.
- **Reductive:** We don’t think strengthening the connective tissue of our communities is reduce-able to any *one* issue (i.e., equity, climate, marriage, natalism, etc.). While these issues may intersect with/be relevant in local contexts where our members live, our membership is *not* about any one reductive “lens.”
- **Intellectualizing:** We don’t think you can just research, write, or talk about issues related to community without practicing it. Creating a feedback loop between theory and practice is essential. People looking for a purely intellectual space should look elsewhere.

Our prospective member archetypes

By this point, if you're asking the question, "Is this group for me?", you probably want to know where you can fit in. Through our interviews and ongoing interactions with subscribers, we've learned that we have five types of prospective members (listed in order of prevalence):

- **Practitioners:** You're actively doing the work of community building within your neighborhood, community or religious/spiritual group(s), government, nonprofit, union, small business, and the like.
- **Community Curious:** You're interested in doing more community building work, either full-time (e.g., becoming a practitioner) or in your personal life.
- **Funders:** You're actively funding work related to *Connective Tissue* (community, civic life, connection, etc.), or considering doing so in your role as a funder.
- **Thinkers:** You're actively researching, theorizing, and/or writing about issues loosely related to *Connective Tissue* — and connecting them to practice.
- **Neighbors:** You're a member of your neighborhood and/or local community and care about your membership — both in theory and practice.

Our intention is to create a holistic ecosystem of *Connective Tissue* members, which means all of these groups have an important role to play (and it means funders participate as *peers*, not people who wield outsized power). Our goal is to cultivate a member experience where members from each of these groups can benefit and contribute as *Connective Tissue* members.

How will membership work?

We see this initial membership launch as a "minimum viable membership." It's the simplest set of offerings that can be construed as membership and that can be built on over time. Our intention for *Connective Tissue* membership is to begin with a digital network that evolves into an IRL network based on member interest and capacity. Both our digital and in-person offerings will be shaped by our members, who will help drive the strategic and tactical direction of *Connective Tissue* membership. It is members who will build the bridge between our digital starting point and IRL end goal.

Our initial offerings

- **Interactive Events:** We'll host live digital events, starting out monthly and potentially going more than once per month based on member interest. Preliminary event types include *AMAs* with Q&A guests, post-article *discussion*

sessions, *debates* on relevant issues, and the “*Beyond Bob*” Book Club. (Example: “[Joy to the Civic World](#)”).

- **Member Database:** We’ll start with an opt-in *member database* for members to learn about each other’s work and connect around shared interests ([see preview here](#)). We’ll potentially add to the database with further resources, such as a *reading/content list*, as member interest permits.
- **The “Tissue Review”:** A monthly deep dive into our favorite articles, books, and research from the past month or so. (Example: “[2024 Tissue Review](#)”).
- **A Digital Network**, hosted on Slack, for members to continue connecting with, learning from, and receiving support from other members — within and across place.¹

The role of member shaping

This is all a work-in-progress, and *Connective Tissue* members will have several opportunities to shape the direction of the membership network. We’ll create committees for members to join and lead. We’ll tap members to host events and identify additional tools/resources that could be useful to fellow members. And we’ll continue to have formal and informal conversations with members to get a sense of what’s working, what can be improved, and where they want membership to go. You can read a bit more about our initial vision for member shaping and governance [here](#).

Our IRL x Digital future

While our integrated IRL and digital member network will be shaped by our members, we’ve envisioned a few elements of what this peer-based network will entail:

- **Annual Gatherings** of members from across the country to meet, connect, learn about each other’s work, and get inspired.
- **Regional/Local Groups** of members who gather regularly, build relationships, and participate in shared projects and experiments.

We’ve shared our preliminary thinking about the rollout of these in-person elements in the [Additional FAQs section](#) of this document.

What are the membership levels?

Starting with three core levels

¹ The overwhelming feedback we’ve received is that people only want a digital network if it supplements some sort of in-person network (rather than substituting for it).

Membership is a natural extension of what we're already doing with *Connective Tissue*, not a replacement for it. **As such, all of our existing offerings — our monthly [Originals](#) and [Q&As](#) — will remain free for all subscribers.** So, what are you paying for, then? Funny you ask. The preliminary dues-paying memberships will include:

- **Members**, who pay dues of \$10/month or \$100/year, can participate in our monthly-plus interactive events, join the member database, receive the “Tissue Review,” and can serve on member committees.
- **Group Members**, who are groups of 3+ members from the same organization, pay dues of \$8/month or \$80/year to receive all the same benefits as individual Members.
- **Founding Members**, who pay dues of \$200/year, both support *Connective Tissue*’s mission and receive priority registration for our annual gathering, access to monthly office hours with Sam, recognition on our site and member database, and *Connective Tissue* swag (check out the 2025 swag pack [here](#)).

You can find brief summaries of these membership levels, including monthly/annual dues and affiliated offerings, in the table below.

Free	Member	Group Member	Founding Member
\$0/Mo.	\$100/yr or \$10/mo	\$80/yr or \$8/mo	\$200/yr
<i>Continue enjoying Connective Tissue:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 Original/mo. • 1 Q&A/mo. 	<i>All the benefits of free subs, plus:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monthly live events and discussions • Interactive member database • Monthly “Tissue Review” • Serve on member committees 	<i>All of the same member benefits, just for groups of 3+ members from the same organization.</i>	<i>All the benefits of members, plus:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Priority sign up for annual gathering • Monthly 1-on-1 and group office hours with Sam • Recognition on CT site and database • Annual CT swag

Making membership accessible

Our goal is to make membership as accessible as possible to those with financial need, while ensuring all members are paying something. To that end, we are happy to offer a sliding scale membership with a floor of \$5/month for those who need it.

We're using the honor system and we're not going to verify need, so we ask that you only sign up using our sliding scale if you actually need it.

Because Substack does not allow us to integrate a sliding scale directly into the platform, you can register for your preferred sliding scale membership level in the [appendix linked here](#).

Why should you join?

We believe becoming a member involves both *benefiting* from your membership and *contributing* to it. By joining *Connective Tissue*, you're committing to be an active member, not a passive consumer. Join us and help shape what this member network — and our renewal movement — can become.

How You'll Benefit

- **Connect** with fellow *Connective Tissue* members both locally and nationally — the practitioners, funders, thinkers, and neighbors committed to strengthening the connective tissue of their communities.
- **Get inspiration** from the groups, leaders, theories, models, and practices that are shaping new civic possibilities for their neighborhoods and communities.
- **Experiment** with practical strategies for cultivating civic membership and local civic life — [welcome kits](#), [activities fairs](#), [civic homecomings](#), [neighbor microgrants](#), and more!

How You'll Contribute

- **Lead** an element of the member experience — from planning and hosting a digital event, to compiling a new member resource, to, eventually, leading a local *Connective Tissue* group in your community.
- **Shape** the future of what the *Connective Tissue* member experience can become, both digitally and in-person.
- **Support** *Connective Tissue's* work, powering us to continue writing imaginative, substantive, practical, and irreverent pieces on our shared civic possibilities, and to build the member network that will help realize these possibilities.

Why it Matters

- **Cultivate** solidarity and shared purpose with peers committed to imagining and building toward a new paradigm of civic renewal — within and across place.

- **Prove** out new models, approaches, practices, and ways of being for our generational project to renew local civic life.
- **Build** the self-sustaining, self-governing organizing infrastructure to power our emerging civic renewal movement.

What's next?

Make it official and become a *Connective Tissue* member by [paying your dues today](#).

When you join, you'll immediately be invited to participate and contribute as a member, including:

- **Attending one of [our upcoming events](#)**, including our [AMA with Sam Pressler \(7/17\)](#), our [AMA with Casper ter Kuile \(7/31\)](#), and our [Neighbor Membership Workshop \(8/27\)](#) with Vanessa Elias, Gerrel Jones, and D.J. Trischler.
- **Accessing our Member Database**, which will include completing a brief intake form and then gaining access to the database once it reaches a critical mass of members who join.
- **Joining our member committees** — attend our first [membership committee interest meeting \(8/7\)](#) and start or participate in a committee of your choosing after that!

Ready to become a *Connective Tissue* member? [Join today](#).

Additional FAQs

We recognize that we don't address every question in the Primary FAQs section above. As such, we'll compile additional FAQs on an ongoing basis as we receive them from prospective members.

What differentiates membership from a typical paid Substack subscription?

Membership	Subscription
Network-First: Membership is about building a network that is in service of its members. Your dues power a membership network that evolves to meet its members' needs and desires.	Content-First: Subscriptions are mostly about paying to receive content. Your subscription fees support a writer to create more content for you to read.
Participatory: Membership is a participatory experience. As a member, you'll have the opportunity to interact with fellow members, plan and host activities, and shape the member experience.	Passive: Subscriptions are a mostly passive experience. While you can engage in comments and chats, paid subscriptions on Substack mostly involve receiving <i>more</i> content.
Relational: Membership involves multi-directional relationships. Members will have the opportunity to connect with us directly and connect with one another within and across place.	One-Way: Subscriptions tend to be one-way relationships. Often, the audience knows a lot about the writer, but the writer rarely knows who is in their audience beyond names and emails.

How did you arrive at the membership price point?

As anyone running a business will tell you, pricing is an art, not a science. Still, we did our best to come up with a fair, high value membership price point. This included taking a few steps:

1. **Researching comps**, including groups like the [MCJ Collective](#), which have a similar membership model and charge \$10/month.

2. **Conducting subscriber interviews**, where we asked subscribers how much they'd be willing to pay for a *Connective Tissue* membership, and \$10/month was at the very low-end of the range for dues.
3. **Getting further subscriber input**, including running potential membership levels and price points by subscribers to receive their input on where we landed.

When will IRL member activities begin?

Summer / Fall 2025

We're planning to experiment with some initial IRL activities through the summer and fall. We intend to host a few dinners/evening gatherings in cities where we have a larger subscriber and membership base. We're also in the early stages of planning a few in-person events with partner organizations. We'll communicate more information on these initial activities as they are finalized.

Early / Mid-2026

We intend to begin rolling out a more comprehensive IRL membership in 2026. This will include at least one gathering for members from across the country, likely in the early part of the year. If membership and leadership interest permit, we'll also start to experiment with launching locally organized groups by mid-2026. We expect the gathering and the local groups to be shaped, in part, by our members.

How will member governance work?

Member governance will continue to take shape as the digital and IRL membership experiences take shape.² To start, we will have membership committees devoted to developing and organizing our initial offerings, such as our events (e.g., the discussion sessions) and our resources (e.g., member database). Over time, we'll likely establish committees to help with our IRL activities — planning the annual gathering, for instance. If and when we do launch local groups, we anticipate those groups having their own local governance and decision-making structures.

All of what we've just described is our best, high-level guess of what member governance could look like. It's likely that, through the process of launching membership, we'll continue to identify opportunities for members to participate in shaping the *Connective Tissue* experience.

² *Please Note:* While we're always open to member input on what we publish through *Connective Tissue*, member governance will *not* apply to our editorial decisions.

How will member dues be used?

The short answer is we don't know — it will depend on how the network evolves. Initially, our plan is to use member dues to support our part-time efforts to publish the newsletter and facilitate the member network. Over time, our intention is to allocate pools of funds for members to decide how to use. Our intent is to work with members along the way to balance our needs to support ourselves with members interests for using their dues.

I'm having trouble with my payment getting processed. What should I do?

We had been having issues with Substack's payments when we were testing, but they should be fixed now. If you run into an issue paying on your desktop, attempt to redo the payment on your phone using either **Apple Pay** or **Google Pay**, which have worked as back-up options. If you still run into issues with that approach, email us directly (theconnectivetissue@gmail.com) and we will loop in Substack Support. Again, the problem we were encountering appears to have been solved, but nothing will surprise us at this point.

Appendices

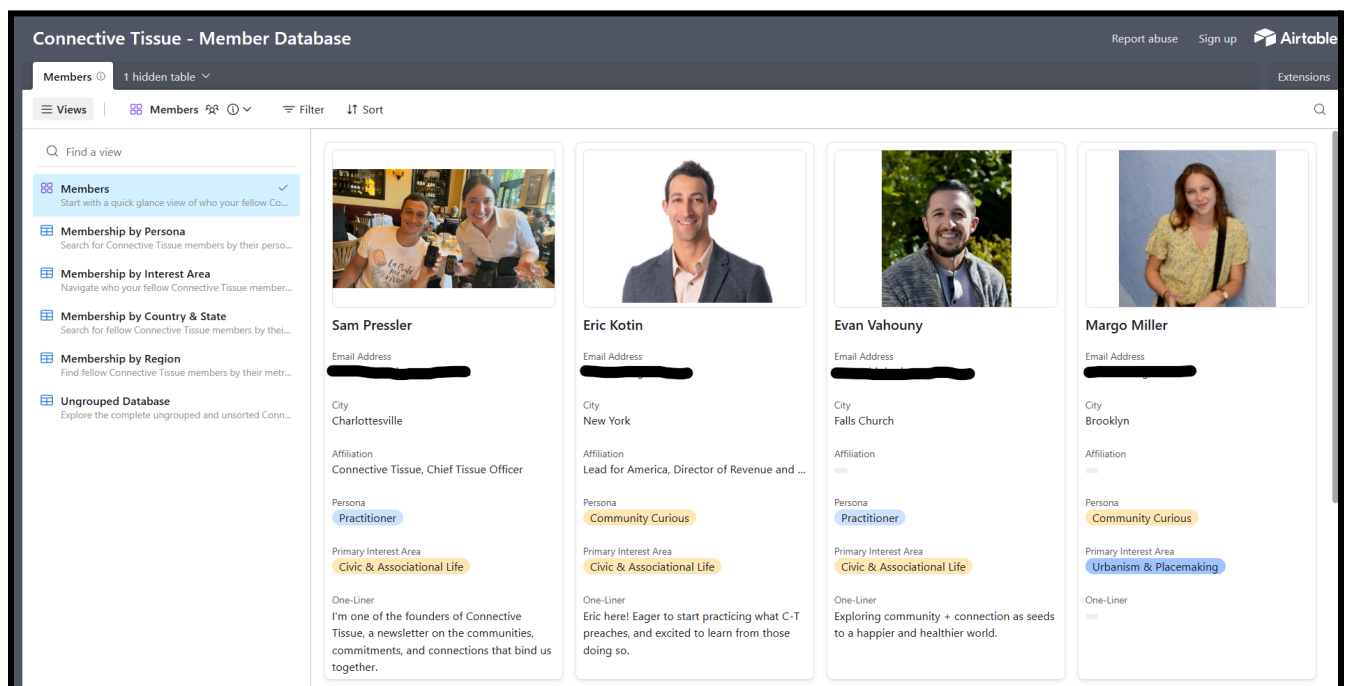
Sliding Scale Sign Up

You can sign up for five levels of sliding scale membership using the custom links included below:

- **50% Off:** \$5/month or \$50/year
- **40% Off:** \$6/month or \$60/year
- **30% Off:** \$7/month or \$70/year
- **20% Off:** \$8/month or \$80/year
- **10% Off:** \$9/month or \$90/year

Member Database Preview

As a *Connective Tissue* member, you will have the opportunity to join our members-only Airtable database. You can use this database to find other people in your region and nationally to connect with, whether that be IRL or digitally. You can use it to search for people who have similar interests relevant to *Connective Tissue*, from civic and associational life, to religion and spirituality. And you can use it both to offer and receive support from your fellow members. We've included a preview of the database in the screenshot below.



2025 Swag Pack

Our swag pack for Founding Members who join in 2025 will include a *Connective Tissue* picnic blanket for gathering with friends, a *Connective Tissue* sticker, and some complimentary *Connective Tissues*.



Subscriber Interview Synthesis

We conducted interviews with dozens of subscribers throughout May 2025 to help inform the next phase of *Connective Tissue*. You can find a synthesis of these interviews in [this Google Document](#).