

Want access to your Facebook group? In the future, you may have to pay

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A new AI tool created to help identify certain kinds of substance abuse based on a homeless youth's Facebook posts could provide homeless shelters with vital information to incorporate into each individual's case management plan. Credit: CC0 Public Domain

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pay.

Facebook is experimenting with allowing [group](#) administrators to charge subscription fees for access to premium content, a practice already employed by some groups through outside sources.

If it's rolled out more broadly, the new feature would not affect current groups, but would be available to new groups, Facebook says.

Facebook announced Wednesday it's testing a subscription tool with select groups. Subscriptions for the test groups range from \$4.99 to \$29.99 per month, Facebook said.

"We hear from group admins that they're looking for ways to help them earn money to deepen engagement with their members and continue to support their communities," Alex Deve, product director of groups at Facebook, said in a blog post. "Subscription groups were created to make it easier for admins to provide these experiences with built-in tools, and to save them time so they can focus on offering members-only content."

Facebook, which was supposed to give people a sense of common humanity, has instead increased polarization, with the spread of fake news, Russian interference and reinforcement of filter bubbles during contentious elections in the U.S. and overseas.

For Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg, the building blocks for community are Facebook groups, the private or public communal areas where people gather over common interests or challenges.

As part of that new thrust, Facebook has been surveying group administrators to find out their pain points and try to solve them. Collecting payments is one of those. Until this experiment, there has

been no way to directly collect payment from members of Facebook groups.

What does this mean for you? If you start a new Facebook group, you may be able to charge a subscription fee sometime in the future. That can be helpful—say by making your group more exclusive—or could drive the more casual group member away.

Some groups already charge a subscription, according to Deve. So this will just make that easier.

"Many admins do this today by creating an additional subscribers-only group that sits alongside their existing group, and rely on additional tools to track and collect payments," Deve wrote.

Now, if the trial is successful, new Facebook groups will have the option to charge for content.

The [subscription](#) groups pilot is being tested with a small number of Facebook groups of varying interests, including college planning help for high school parents, home cleaning advice and a meal preparation page to assist with grocery shopping.

Facebook says it won't take a cut of the test groups' subscriptions, but iOS and Android operating systems would take a 30 percent cut when users subscribe through those app stores.

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