

A Village You Can Run Yourself

Stop renting a corner of someone else’s platform. Run your own ground, under your own name, free to connect with others without being absorbed.

Précis. Almost every platform a community can join is a tenancy: an account on infrastructure someone else owns, arranged their way, under their name, and any work with another group happens inside their walls or not at all. The Village works the other way round. A community stands up its own Village from a template that fits the kind of body it is, brands it as its own, and can host it on its own ground. Villages then federate, connecting on bilateral, consented, revocable terms and sharing only what each side agrees. An organisation can even run a whole network of branded Villages for the communities it serves. This essay is about running, branding and federating your own.

The offers a community gets online are all much the same, so familiar they have stopped looking like a choice. You sign up. You get an account inside a product someone else built and runs. What a “member” is, what a “group” is, what you may and may not do: all of it was decided by the vendor, and it applies whether it fits you or not. The name over the door is theirs. If you ever want to work alongside another community, you can only do it where you both rent from the same landlord, inside the same walls. That is sold as connection. It is closer to common tenancy.

A better tenancy is still a tenancy. The real answer is to stop being a tenant. A Village belongs to the community it serves: stood up for it, shaped to it, branded as it, hosted on ground it controls if it wants. Because each Village is its own, Villages work together by explicit agreement between equals rather than by accident of sharing a landlord. That connection, federation, is the most important part, and we will come to it.

The template, not the straitjacket

A Village starts from a template that matches the kind of body you are:

- a community group, club or small society
- a family or whānau
- a parish
- a business, committee or board

The template is a starting configuration (sensible roles, a sensible structure, the right shape of governance for that kind of group) that you then adjust until it is yours. One-model-for-everyone is exactly what the rest of this series keeps running into; this is the reverse.

Part of that adjustment is language. A Village speaks in your words. A parish has parishioners; a board has directors and resolutions; a hapū names its members in te reo. Set the vocabulary and the software stops sounding bought-in and starts sounding like the place it serves. The look is yours too: your logo, your colours, your own domain, even mail from your own address. The branding is simply the visible part of a deeper fact: the Village is yours.

Every one of these types runs as a live demo you can walk through now: family, whānau, clubs, a small business, a conservation group, a parish, and more. They are indexed at mysovereignty.digital/demos.html.

Your own ground

Where a Village lives scales with what is at stake:

- **Shared infrastructure**, with each community walled off from every other in software. Enough for most.
- **A dedicated database** of its own, for groups that want more separation.
- **Deployed on infrastructure of your own**, for a group that will not put its data on anyone else's machine.

Custody is a dial the community turns to match its own need, from “kept apart on shared ground” to “deployed on infrastructure of your own.” Most will not need the far end. The ones who do (security-minded teams, bodies handling material that must never leave the building) can reach it without leaving the platform, because the platform was built to let go.

Federation without absorption

Because each Village is its own, two that want to work together do so through a federation agreement: explicit, bilateral, consented on both sides, sharing only what they agree. Nothing is pooled by default, and no third party sits in the middle to reach through.

Three things make that real:

- **Revocable**. Either side can leave after an agreed notice period, and leave *with its record*. Exit is a right.
- **A defined dispute path**, resolved in graduated steps, not by whoever owns the platform.
- **It works across servers**. Two Villages on entirely different machines can federate through an authenticated server-to-server link, so federating never re-centralises everyone onto one company's infrastructure.

Guardianship travels with the data: the kaitiaki bound to a record stays bound to it when the record crosses into another Village, so sharing never means surrendering the duty of care.

A plain example. A business and its accountant each keep their own Village and federate to share exactly the records they agree on: the ledgers, the filings, nothing else. They are connected for the work that needs both of them, and neither is absorbed. When the engagement ends, the federation is revoked and each walks away whole. The tenancy model cannot offer that, because there the connection is the dependency.

How federation works in practice, including the agreement types, the consent, and the exit rights, is set out at mysovereignty.digital/federation.html.

Networks, and the people who run them

One community running its own Village is the unit. The same architecture lets an organisation run a whole network of them, under its own name, with governance settings that flow down to the Villages beneath it: a diocese for its parishes, a federation for its member groups, a cooperative for its locals. Those settings are tighten-only. A network can hold its Villages to a stricter standard than the platform floor, never a looser one.

This capability is built and being accredited in stages, with the controls such a role demands. It is also an invitation rather than a settled programme. Who runs a network for others, and on what terms, is a question of mutual fit between that organisation and us, not a seat we have already assigned, and not something we will dress up as decided while it is still a conversation. The capability is real and running; the relationships around it are built one honest agreement at a time.

A new way of seeing what a platform is for

Put these together and the picture inverts. Rather than communities as tenants of one large platform, you get a landscape of communities that each own their Village, brand it as theirs, host it where they choose,

and connect on agreements they wrote and can revoke. Some run alone; some cluster into networks; all keep their own record and their own name. A platform stops being the place everyone is kept and becomes a way of building places that belong to the people in them, wired together without funnelling through a centre.

This suits bodies that already think in terms of their own identity and relationships: dioceses and parishes, iwi and hapū, cooperatives and their locals, professional bodies and their chapters, regional clusters that want to work together without merging. “Join our platform” was always the wrong shape of offer for them. “Run your own, and federate” is the one we built.

The point of the series, here

The earlier essays were about the AI: owned, situated, bounded, kept where it cannot leak. This one is about the ground it runs on and how that ground connects. An AI you own is only really yours if the platform under it is yours too: your template, your name, your own infrastructure if you choose, your federations on your terms. Otherwise you have a community’s own AI sitting inside a vendor’s community, which is half a sovereignty and so none.

You can run it yourself, brand it as your own, host it on ground you control, and connect to others without being swallowed, revoking the connection without losing what is yours. No vendor sits in the middle of any of it. That is the new way of seeing the world this series has been building towards: not a better seat in someone else’s hall, but a hall of your own, with the freedom to open a door to the next one.

The Village is a running system, not a brochure — the templates, branding and federation described here are shipped and in service, and a Village can be deployed on infrastructure of your own; see it at mysovereignty.digital. Federation is bilateral, consented and revocable by design; the network-operator role is an open invitation, not a settled arrangement. — John G. Stroh, My Digital Sovereignty Ltd., June 2026.