



# **Advocacy Toolkit**

## **Social Media Advocacy 102**

Creating a Social Media Strategy

**NRHC would like to thank Capital One for its generous support of this Advocacy Toolkit and our Social Media campaign.**



## Introduction

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The key to social media is an effective strategy.

Social media has revolutionized the way nonprofit organizations communicate with the public. Today, more than 90 percent of all nonprofits use social media to reach supporters, donors, volunteers, and policymakers.

Unfortunately, many rural organizations have not yet embraced social media. In 2013, NRHC polled its membership—comprised of rural housing advocates and practitioners—and found that 30 percent do not use Facebook at all or do so only on an infrequent basis. When asked what was the biggest challenge to maintaining an effective social media presence, a majority (55 percent) cited the lack of a strategy and limited resources. Others avoided social media due to fears about controlling messaging and monitoring employees or the lack of buy-in from upper management or their Board of Directors.

In this toolkit, you will find important information on how to create and implement an effective social media strategy—regardless of your organization’s available resources. We hope this information will inspire you to begin to use social media or to take your efforts to the next level.

I would like to thank Capital One for its generous support of this Advocacy Toolkit, and for their commitment to improving access to affordable rural housing.

Thank you for your advocacy,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robert A. Rapoza".

Robert A. Rapoza  
Executive Secretary

## Creating a Social Media Strategy

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Any nonprofit organization—regardless of available resources—can create a social media strategy to fit its needs. Below are some basic tips on ways to begin or improve your organization’s use of social media.

### The Basics

- ◆ **Listen and Learn.** Before creating a strategy, take some time to become familiar with various social media platforms—including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube—and understand their unique audiences, tone, and style.
- ◆ **Set Objectives.** Identify the different goals your organization wants to achieve by using social media, including enhancing your advocacy efforts, raising awareness of rural housing issues, engaging volunteers or the families you serve, and marketing your events or services.
- ◆ **Who Is Your Audience?** Who do you need to engage in order to reach your objectives? What motivates your audience to take action? Create a map of your different audience types and the outcomes you want to achieve. Think about who they are, why they are important to your strategy, what actions you want them to take, and what your audience needs and wants from you.
- ◆ **Choose A Platform.** Choose social media platforms, based on your objectives and audience. Focus on one platform at a time. Start small and build slowly. Integrate each new social media platform into your larger communications and strategy plans.
- ◆ **Staffing And Schedules.** Remember, you don’t need to create a new, full-time job position to benefit from social media. All you need is one or two staff members who are comfortable and familiar with the technology and have a good understanding of the organization, its mission, and messaging.
  - ◇ Staff can aside as little as 30 minutes a day to monitor and moderate conversations on Facebook.
  - ◇ Create a schedule of who will post and when. Be sure to keep your schedule flexible enough so that your organization can also respond to news as it happens.
  - ◇ As a rule of thumb, post to Facebook no more than once a day and no less than 3 times a week.
  - ◇ Engage your entire staff in brainstorming topics for posts so that the breadth of your organization is represented. Upcoming events, holidays, and current news can provide good opportunities for posts.
- ◆ **Focus On Content.** It is difficult to create entirely original social media content, so sharing content from other organizations is a necessity. Not only does it help build relationships with these organizations, but they are also more likely to share your content too. Brainstorm diverse places that you can pull content from, though be sure to cite your source.
- ◆ **Measure Performance.** Most social media platforms offer free analytic tools. For example, Facebook offers a number of free tools to measure performance, including:
  - ◇ The number of people who saw your post;
  - ◇ The percentage of people who engaged with your Facebook page by clicking, liking, sharing, or commenting on posts;
  - ◇ The percentage of people who consumed your content by watching videos, viewing photos, and following links you post; and
  - ◇ The percentage of people who took negative actions, such as hiding your posts, unliking your page, or reporting it as spam.

## Overcoming Social Media Fears

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Some nonprofits shy away from using social media because of fears of managing employees, losing control of messaging, and negative feedback. However, none of these should stop your organization from embracing social media.

### Employee Policies

Establish clear expectations for employees who contribute to your organization's official social media channels.

- ◆ **Rely On Experienced Staff.** Do not assign responsibility for your organization's social media to an unsupervised intern. It is a tool that must be overseen by a staff member who understands your organization, its values, and goals. Moreover, you want your Facebook activity to continue when the internship is over!
- ◆ **Authorization.** Limit official social media use to only those individuals with express authorization. Create a protocol for sharing information with the public in emergency or crisis situations.
- ◆ **Confidential Information.** Make sure your social media policies gives specific examples of the types of information are confidential and cannot be shared online, including employee health information, social security numbers, addresses, financial information, or other private information. Prohibit employees from naming or sharing photos of individuals—including individuals your organization has served—without their knowledge and written permission.
- ◆ **Personal Use.** While you may also want to consider adopting policies for employees' personal use of social media, you should be mindful not to tread on their rights under the National Labor Relations Act. Federal limits on social media policies have been changing rapidly. Before adopting a personal use policy, please consult a lawyer.

### Open-Source Branding

Social media facilitates conversations among the public, unlike the one-way messaging traditionally seen in other forms of media. This can lead to great rewards, but it also means that you need to be prepared to respond to negative feedback. Cultivating passionate rural housing supporters can help mitigate these circumstances by offering third-party validation.

- ◆ **Know What Is Being Said.** The simply truth is that if people have something negative to say, they are already saying it. Instead of ignoring these conversations, social media helps you know what people are saying and to respond promptly and directly.
- ◆ **Customer Service 101.** Respond to all negative comments in a timely manner by acknowledging their concerns, offering a solution, and thanking them for contacting you. If you made a mistake, own up to it and do what you can to resolve the issue. If necessary, give commenters a way to contact you offline.
- ◆ **Do Not Delete Negative Comments.** People expect social media to be authentic and transparent. Deleting negative comments is often worse than simply responding because it violates these key principles.
- ◆ **Post Clear Comment Guidelines.** Give commenters notice of your expectations and reserve the right to delete comments or block commenters if posts use obscene, vulgar, derogatory, or discriminatory language.
- ◆ **Learn From Your Mistakes.** Showing the public that you hear and care about their voice goes a long way to turning a negative experience into a positive one. Remember, unlike other forms of media, social media can give you immediate feedback about how to improve you services.



## Making Your Case

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For some nonprofit organizations, the biggest barrier to adopting social media is convincing the Board of Directors that it can add great value to the work that you already do.

### Getting Your Board On Board

- ◆ **A Means, Not An End.** Explain how social media can be used as a means to help your organization accomplish its goals. By framing social media as a tool to support your existing programs—not a separate initiative—you can show Board Members how social media can benefit your organization and its established goals.
- ◆ **Adapting To Current Times.** The debate is over—social media is here to stay. The individuals you serve, your volunteers, and other audiences you want to reach all expect your organization to use social media. Failing to do so puts your reputation at risk.
- ◆ **Compelling Statistics.** There is plenty of research that shows how social media can help nonprofit organizations broaden their reach.
  - ◇ Nearly 60 percent of Facebook users “like” a charity or cause so that they can publicly show their support to their friends.
  - ◇ Nearly half of all Americans discover or learn more about causes they care about via social media.
  - ◇ And 55 percent of those who follow, “like,” or engage with a nonprofit organization on social media have been inspired to “take further action.”
- ◆ **Taking the Lead.** Too many rural housing organizations have not yet embraced social media. This provides your organization with the opportunity to take the lead and establish your expertise and credibility.
- ◆ **Leverage Board Leaders.** Before presenting your social media plan, reach out to a Board Member who could serve as a potential ally or supporter to get feedback. Ask them to help you deliver the presentation or lead the Board discussion. Board Members are more likely to listen to their peers.



## Resources

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### Tips and Training

- **Socialbrite:** <http://www.socialbrite.org/>
- **New Organizing Initiative:** <http://neworganizing.com/>
- **Nonprofit Tech For Good:** [nptechforgood.com](http://nptechforgood.com)

### Social Media Strategies and Policies

- **Nonprofit Social Media Policy Workbook:** [http://www.idealware.org/sites/idealware.org/files/sm\\_policy\\_full\\_web\\_version.pdf](http://www.idealware.org/sites/idealware.org/files/sm_policy_full_web_version.pdf)
- **Policy Tool:** <http://socialmedia.policytool.net/>
- **Create a Social Media Policy:** <http://www.socialbrite.org/2013/02/05/create-a-social-media-policy-for-your-nonprofit/>
- **Social Media Policy:** <http://www.nonprofitmarketingguide.com/blog/2010/05/03/rough-draft-of-a-nonprofit-social-media-policy/>

### Sample Social Media Calendars

- **JCSM:** <http://jcsocialmarketing.com/2013/07/control-the-chaos-with-a-social-media-calendar-template/>