

Best Practices and Guidelines for Social Media Engagement

Social media allows you to connect with people online in a way like never before. As more people engage online, social media has become an essential piece of the anti-violence movement. Perhaps more importantly, social media also provides rural survivors an outlet to share their stories and to find healing and solidarity.

Social media can highlight the great work agencies are doing within the community. According to a survey conducted by the Case Foundation and Social Media for Nonprofits, 74% of nonprofits say they use social media networks to announce events, activities, and information about their agencies. Almost all of the survey respondents (97%) said they are on Facebook.

Some rural agencies exist in parts of the country where Internet may be spotty, and a social media presence isn't common. Many rural agencies don't have a Facebook page or even a website. For programs that exist in those areas, having an online presence may not be the right way to reach survivors and the community. **For programs that have already started to create an online presence, this toolkit is designed to help you navigate the complex world of social media.** As you develop a social media presence, carefully review your special conditions and any restrictions from grant funds that will be used to support the work.

The key to making social media successful for nonprofits is to move beyond a "like" on Facebook and into action. This action may be signing a petition, volunteering, or more. Social media can be a great tool for community engagement.

Your agency's social media platforms can help provide a human component to your work. It should be personable yet professional. And ultimately, social media engagement should help your agency fulfill its mission to serve sexual assault survivors across your rural service area.

Tips on getting your online supporters to take action

Have a conversation. Have you ever tried posting something on Facebook simply asking your followers to *like* and *share*? You'd be surprised how many people will take you up on that! In addition, posts that end with a question mark usually generate twice as many likes, comments, and shares.

Post something visually stimulating. Attaching photos or videos to your social media post is a great way to engage your supporters. This is especially true if you're sharing photos or videos of *real people*. If your agency uses photos of community member or volunteers, be sure to get their permission. And, as always, we never include photos identifying actual survivors. Infographics can also be a great way to get attention on social media. You can create fun and easy visuals and infographics online utilizing web platforms like www.canva.com.

Most people are mobile. Agency newsletters and websites should be mobile-friendly. What this means is that a person should be able to easily access your email newsletters and/or website on their cell phones. Many website editors (like www.wix.com, for instance) provide you with the ability to edit the mobile template to ensure your website is mobile friendly. Since 47% of people access email and websites using a smartphone, it's important that the information you're sharing on your website and social media can be accessed on a cell phone.

What should your social media policy look like?

As more and more rural nonprofits connect with supporters online, it's important to have a social media policy to provide guidance for staff. A social media policy sets clear expectations for team members on social media, and helps answer questions staff may have about how your program uses social media and the role they play.

Your social media policy should be clear and concise. We recommend that even staff members who may not have regular access to your agency's social media platforms should still be aware of the social media guidelines.

In your policy, consider what you want to accomplish by being on social media. Include goals that help you achieve this. Be aware of who your target audience is, and how you can best reach that audience. Have members of your leadership team review your policy, and then share widely.

Define the policy for your agency. Your social media should include a vision statement that helps guide staff, interns, and volunteers yet empowers them to make decisions themselves. Your policy should contain examples of what should or shouldn't be posted online. An example of what should be avoided on your social media page could include posting about controversial or political topics, or linking to graphic images. Your policy should provide clear and simple guidelines for staff

members, interns, volunteers, and board members. Keep in mind these guidelines might be different for staff versus interns, volunteers, and board members

These guidelines will also be different for work supported by grant funds versus donations or general funds. Grant funds can never be used to fundraise or make political statements, and shouldn't be used to post about controversial topics, so you should outline these restrictions in your policy. When generating social media content, many organizations find it helpful to use general or unrestricted funds and volunteer time rather than staff time. Be sure to get approval from your grant project manager before posting anything funded by grants.

Identify and incorporate the values of your agency into your policy. Start with your mission and identify a list of values that are central to the work you do, like a commitment to social justice and anti-oppression. These are your **core values**. Once these have been identified, incorporate them into your social media guidelines. You can demonstrate your values by the stories you post and the conversations you engage in. You might want to let your community know that your organization supports the outreach efforts of a local migrant health workers' clinic, for example.

Social media needs to be a team effort. We know that most rural agencies don't have the resources for a full-time staff person in charge of social media. Team members all have a shared responsibility with one another to manage, monitor, and respond to social media posts. This allows your agency to be in multiple places at once, which can help with online engagement.

Try coming up with a social media calendar, where a different person is in charge of posting every other day/week/etc. This also helps each of your posts be unique to the individual who is crafting them. We recommend a **social media policy** so everyone who is posting has the same information.

Creating and sharing content on social media. What makes a good social media post? The answer to this question may be vastly different from one agency to the next. That's one reason why having a social media policy is so crucial. Ideally, your posts should include information about:

- Events and trainings hosted by your agency or like-minded agencies that help advance your cause

- Interesting, relevant, and newsworthy information related sexual violence, domestic violence, teen dating violence, and stalking both statewide and nationally
- The occasional call to action (volunteerism, etc.) that allows your supporters to get involved in your work

But *where* should you look for content? For starters, make sure that whoever is monitoring your social media is signed up for **Google Alerts** through a Gmail account. This helps you monitor the web for crucial keywords that may come up in the news. For instance, every time the name of your agency is mentioned in a news article, you will receive an email notification to your Gmail account and a link to that story you can share. This is also helpful for monitoring trends in the anti-violence movement, like campus-based assault or prevention of sexual violence. It's easy to create alerts—just go to <https://www.google.com/alerts> and set up your keyword phrases. Keep in mind you may have to edit phrases over time if you're not getting the type of news you're looking for.

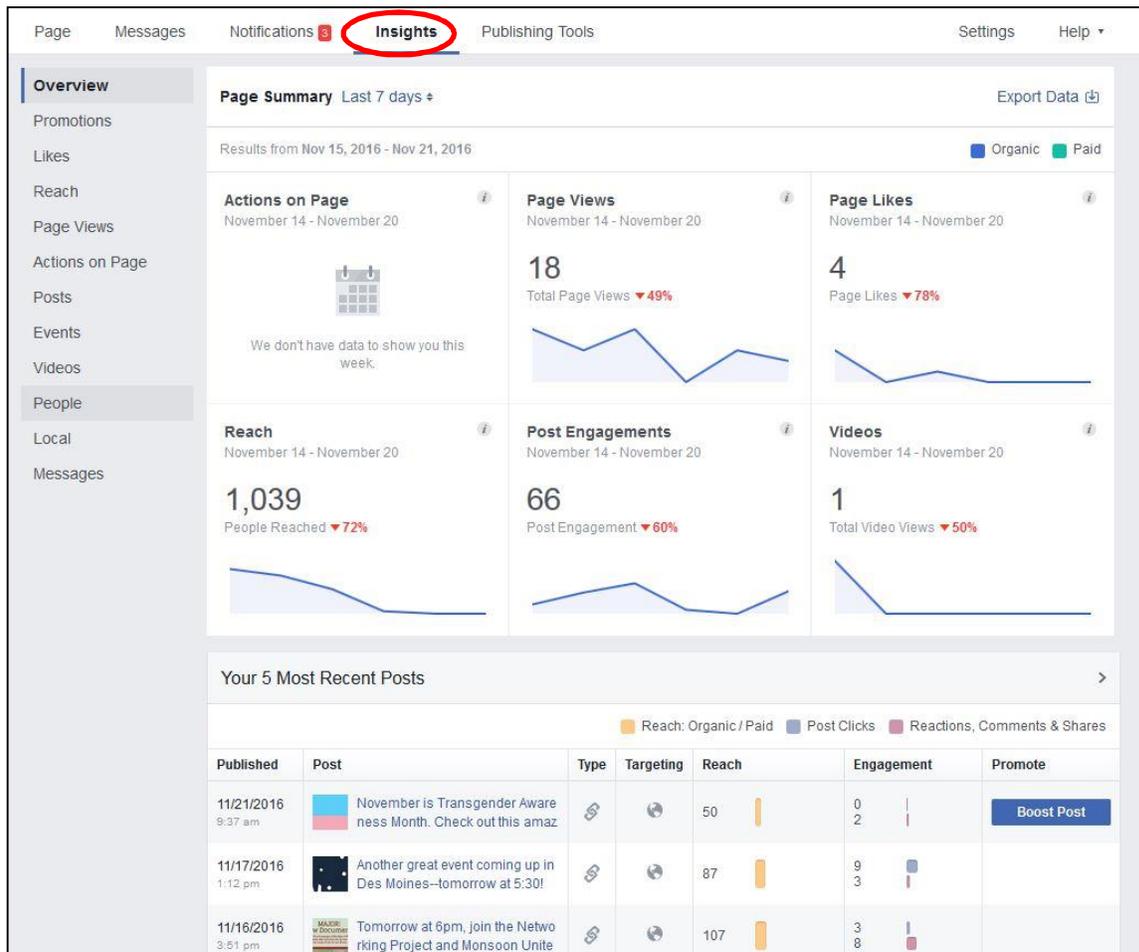
In addition, you'll want to monitor what other like-minded agencies are sharing on their social media feeds. Retweets, sharing posts, and liking posts as your agency will help you with your visibility. This also helps you build your own content. Don't be afraid to "borrow" other agency's posts. You may want to tag the agency you're borrowing from. This is a particularly helpful strategy for rural programs because your agency will rarely need to create unique content.

Protect the privacy of others. Photos or videos posted on social media may be viewed and shared multiple times. As a result, your agency should have a consent form for participants of events, etc., to fill out ahead of time. This may be as simple as a checkbox for an online event registration that provides your agency with permission to take photos, videos, and more, *and* to use those photos online for posts on Facebook, your website, and so forth. Or you may have a registration table where participants can mark their nametags with a green dot (meaning they are willing to be photographed) or a red dot (meaning they are not willing to be photographed). Consult with your program's attorney, if applicable, on what makes the most sense for your agency. If a participant does *not* give consent to be photographed or put on video, then you must respect that decision and ensure their likeness doesn't turn up in any of your digital materials.

Best practices for agencies on social media

You can't be on every social media platform, so don't try to be. As much as we would like to be on every social media platform ever created, it's not realistic and it doesn't make sense to be. Based on the demographics you serve within your community, your agency might only be on Facebook and nothing else. And that's okay! Facebook might be all an agency needs to connect with survivors and supporters, especially in rural communities. Larger agencies situated in an urban hub but surrounded by rural counties may have the capacity to utilize other popular platforms like Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, Tumblr, and others. Be realistic, though. It's usually best to start with the basics like Facebook, and branch out from there.

Monitor your social media platform(s). We know. We get it. Monitoring social media sounds scary. The good news is that there are lots of different online tools that make it easy to monitor activity and engagement on social media. Most platforms have analytics setting that you can pull reports from (see below for an example of Facebook analytics utilizing the "insights" toolbar).



Websites like www.hootsuite.com allow you to monitor what's said about your agency online. These are helpful tools for scheduling posts ahead of time. This frees up valuable work time. Monitoring social media helps you know when the best time to post content is. It also helps you know what content your audience likes to engage with.

Check out these helpful resources from the website [Social Media Examiner](http://www.socialmediaexaminer.com) about what you can learn from analytics:

“How to Use Facebook Insights to Improve Your Engagement”

<http://www.socialmediaexaminer.com/how-to-use-facebook-insights-to-improve-engagement/>

“9 Google Analytics Tips to Improve Your Marketing”

<http://www.socialmediaexaminer.com/google-analytics-tips-to-improve-your-marketing/>

A response on social media means you care. Whenever survivors or supporters engage with your agency online, your response time should be quick. Questions, comments of praise, or even negative comments should be responded to and answered as soon as possible. For most social media platforms, the industry standard response time to comments and messages is 2 hours. For most rural programs, though, this is an unreasonable expectation because we oftentimes don't have the capacity to respond as quickly as we might like. As a result, we suggest rural programs try to respond to messages on social media within a day's time, if possible.

Survivors will reach out for help on social media. We recommend having a clear plan of action for how to engage, interact, and provide as much support as possible to survivors on social media. Have a 24/7 crisis or support line listed on all social media platforms for survivors who need it, since a quick response online may not always be possible for many rural programs. For survivors who connect on social media asking for help, remind them that social media is not always private. Encourage them to contact your office or a support line directly. Respond as quickly as possible to any survivors requesting support through social media.

Be personable. Engagement needs to be a priority on social media. Being passive on social media means you won't have very much engagement. Respond to questions, comments, and posts that tag your agency name. Use a personable tone and create a

“voice” for your agency that helps your supporters feel connected to you and to the cause. Don’t be afraid to use humor to connect when appropriate. Thank users for their comments and thoughts. Believe it or not, **35% of your time on social media should be engaging with your audience.**

Dealing with negative criticism on social media

Social media can quickly turn constructive online conversations into potentially harmful ones. It’s more important than ever that agencies are monitoring comments and direct messages in real-time whenever possible. You should be prepared to respond these messages in a timely, constructive, and professional manner.

The first thing to understand is that you are not alone. According to a July 2012 survey by Ethical Corporation, 72% of for-profit companies do not feel equipped to deal with social media criticism. Yet this shouldn’t be an excuse to simply not respond to deflectors on social media. Instead, we should view negative criticism on social media as an opportunity to learn, grow, and educate.

We believe agencies should embrace posting about social justice initiatives. Yet we must be prepared for the fact that some of our community members (though certainly not all) may see these posts as “controversial” and choose to respond in a negative way.

As anti-violence agencies, we need to stand up for communities of color and for groups of people often marginalized. We know that oppression is the root cause of sexual violence. We know that sexual violence has historically been used to oppress and marginalize people of color, women, immigrants, Indigenous populations, people with disabilities, LGBTQIA communities, Deaf and Hard of Hearing, and many other groups. This is why we *must* be committed to ending all forms of oppression. As such, it makes sense for our agencies to actively engage in social justice issues in our work and online.

Social media allows us to have a voice on many issues, but it also allows other people watching our social media platforms to have a voice and respond. This may oftentimes include dissenting voices. But that’s okay. This is part of what being on social media is all about.

Helpful tips for dealing with negative criticism on social media

Always respond. Not saying anything makes it seem like your agency is trying to ignore the issue or that you don't care about other opinions. By failing to respond to the person who is upset, you may increase the chance that they will continue to negatively lash out at your agency online. By responding, you show that you respect and understand the person's concerns. This can be particularly helpful when you personally know the people commenting, as is common in a rural community.

At the same time, we encourage you to be measured in your response. Starting a "comment war" won't help anybody. Allow other voices from like-minded users to chime in as well. Try not to edit or delete responses unless a user has said something offensive, racist, or derogatory. Use your best judgment and make sure to outline what these remarks might look like in your policy so staff members know how to handle them. Have guidelines included in your policy for when a staff person should seek the advice of leadership on how to respond to posts or threads that are "out of control" or may be deemed hurtful and offensive.

Be patient and understanding. Don't respond in anger. Take a step back and try to see where the user is coming from. Avoid being critical of the user.

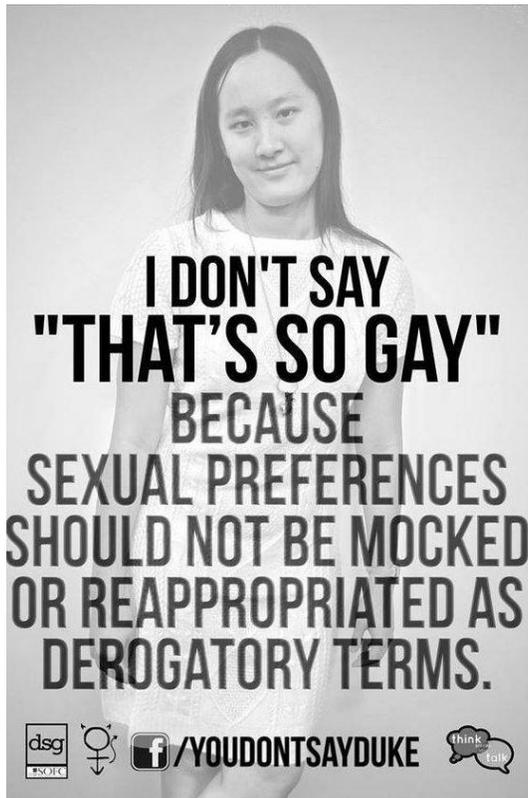
Contact the user privately if appropriate. Especially if a conversation thread on Facebook is becoming inflammatory, it might be best to private message the user and ask if you can talk "offline." Set up a phone call or email them, if appropriate. Try to keep things civil. Not everyone is going to agree with you or understand where you're coming from, and that's okay. Sometimes just offering to chat with someone one-on-one is enough to calm folks down. When in doubt, seek the advice of your co-workers or leadership for suggestions in how to quickly, calmly, and efficiently deal with negativity on social media.

If offensive, consider asking the user to delete their post. Provide the user a choice. Ask them to remove an offensive or derogatory post before deleting it. Politely inform them that you're going to have to remove the post if they do not. If they persist in posting offensive remarks, inform them that you'll have to block them. Talk about how your social media platform is a safe space for survivors and advocates. Keep the user informed every step of the way, and hopefully they will back down. **Blocking a user should *only* be used as a last resort option.**

Let your online community help you respond. Your online community members oftentimes will support your stance on important issues that impact anti-violence work. Your followers understand and appreciate the work that you do, and will stand up for you. While you should still respond to the original post, be aware that some of your online community members may also chime in. This helps create constructive dialogue, but can also be triggering for some if comments become heated or derogatory. Remind your users to keep things civil and polite. Avoid online “wars” that may tarnish the way other users view your agency.

On the following page you will find an examples of a social media post which received criticism, and how IowaCASA chose to respond to that feedback.

If you have questions or concerns about how to respond to users on social media, email leah@iowacasa.org or communications@iowacasa.org.



Nathan L. Winkler How about "I don't say 'sexual preference' because I don't want to imply that being gay or straight or bisexual is a choice."
Like · Reply · Message · 3 · July 20 at 8:43pm

Iowa Coalition Against Sexual Assault
Good point, Nathan, and thank you for your comment. Although we didn't create this image, we agree that the term "sexual preference" is often viewed as derogatory towards those within the LGBTQIA community—although we don't believe this was the intent of the original post. Still, your opinion is very valid and we appreciate your thoughts.
Like · Reply · 1 · Commented on by Matty Smith [?] · July 20 at 10:27pm

Nathan L. Winkler I realize the intent of the image was good and I'm sure the maker's heart is in the right place. I think a lot of allies use "sexual preference" interchangeably with "sexual orientation," but since some opponents use "sexual preference" specifically to mean choice, it's important to point out to allies and even our own community why "sexual orientation" is the appropriate term. Thank you for your kind response.
Unlike · Reply · Message · 3 · July 20 at 10:37pm

Iowa Coalition Against Sexual Assault
Nathan L. Winkler thank YOU! We always appreciate it when supporters of our work engage helpfully in our social media posts. 😊
Like · Reply · Commented on by Matty Smith [?] · July 21 at 8:25am

Lenny Hines I say man-up because it's just a figure of speech man up will you?
Like · Reply · Message · 2 · July 22 at 5:41pm

Iowa Coalition Against Sexual Assault We believe that words matter. Check out this great campaign from our friends at the Maine Coalition Against Sexual Assault about the effect of racist, sexist, and homophobic words on our communities. <http://www.backbonezone.org/>

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BACKBONEZONE.ORG



Creating Your Agency's Social Media Policy

- I. Use your mission statement as a starting point.
 - a. How will your mission statement inform your social media policy?
 - b. What are your agency's core values? How do these values apply to social media?
- II. Define your policy statement.
 - a. How you your agency engage in social media, and on what social media platforms?
 - b. How can staff members help add value to the agency and its online presence?
 - c. How can your agency incorporate its core values into its social media?
 - d. Identify which social media platforms your agency wants to have a presence on, leaving room to expand to different platforms if necessary. If your agency chooses to have multiple social media accounts, will your policy look different for Facebook versus other social media platforms? Include definitions of social media platforms your agency uses.
- III. Define your objectives.
 - a. What does your agency hope to accomplish on social media and why?
 - b. How does social media help support your agency's mission and why?
- IV. Define your goals.
 - a. What level of online engagement does your agency expect on social media? How will you achieve this? How will you know that you've achieved this?
- V. Expectations for staff, volunteers, and board members
 - a. Who will post and when? Your agency may want to break down the various roles of social media—such as looking for content, posting content, and responding to comments. Then assign these roles to staff who either feel most comfortable in these roles, or have the most experience in these roles within their current positions.
 - b. How will staff monitor social media platforms? Your policy may include a social media online monitoring website like Hootsuite as part of your monitoring system. Will all staff be in charge of this monitoring platform?

- c. How will staff respond to negative comments and/or criticism on social media? Perhaps there should be a “chain of command,” where if a team member monitoring your Facebook channel sees something negative, they can alert someone in leadership to find out how they should address the comment.
- d. How will staff provide direct service to survivors online through social media? Determine how much you want to engage with survivors before referring them to your crisis line. But also have a plan for survivors who may not feel comfortable calling a crisis line, and how you can best provide services to them—even if that means utilizing a feature like Facebook Messenger.
- e. Determine whether or not policy will differ between staff, volunteers, and board members. If the role of a volunteer is different than it is for staff, be sure to include this in your policy.
- f. Consider accessibility needs for social media, and include this in your policy. Examples of making social media content accessible could include only sharing videos that have captions and avoiding the use of acronyms or jargon in posts and on your website.
- g. When posting any materials, photos, videos, etc. created by another organization, be aware of possible copyright issues. Always abide by the social media platform’s terms of use.
- h. As with everything created with OVW funds, be sure to include your OVW disclaimer and get approval from your program manager before posting.

Your agency may want to utilize this Nonprofit Social Media Policy Workbook to help you get started:

http://www.racialequitytools.org/resourcefiles/Social_Policy_Media_Policy_Workbook.pdf

Resources

Hootsuite is a program designed to let you manage multiple social media networks utilizing a single website. You can schedule messages through Hootsuite across all the social media platforms you choose to sync to it. You can also see who is liking and/or retweeting your posts. Hootsuite makes social media easier because it allows you to be more engaged without having to log into more than one platform. Hootsuite would be ideal for programs using more than one social media platform. For more information, visit www.hootsuite.com.

Idealware provides tons of useful information about best practices for communications, events, fundraising, graphics and multimedia, websites, and more. It's a great website to browse in your downtime for more information about what you can be doing to improve your communications presence in your community. For more information, visit www.idealware.org.

Social Media Examiner identifies as the world's largest social media marketing resource. Like Idealware, it provides useful information about every social media platform you could possibly think of. Social Media Examiner can help you use social media to connect with customers, drive traffic, generate awareness, and increase visibility and engagement. For more information, visit www.socialmediaexaminer.com.

Tweetdeck allows you to monitor multiple Twitter channels at once on a single website platform (similar to Hootsuite, except designed specifically for Twitter). It includes features to help advanced users get the most of Twitter: manage multiple Twitter accounts, schedule Tweets for posting in the future, build Tweet connections, and more. This would be ideal for programs already familiar with Twitter that are looking to do more, and/or engage more "tweeters." For more information, visit www.tweetdeck.com.

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