

ADMINISTRATION FOR
CHILDREN & FAMILIES
Social Media Planning Guide

Not every office or program needs to use social media. But given the enormity and potential of these channels we must consider: can using these channels further my office’s strategic communication goals and potentially benefit my stakeholders?

This step-by-step guide is designed to help program offices address questions and develop goals needed for a strong social media strategy.

Though offices are required to go through this process when first requesting official social media accounts, it is a process that is valuable to anyone wanting to be more strategic about sharing content on ACF’s existing social media channels or establishing their own presence.

For more information on how to request a social media account, [visit the Digital Toolbox](#).

A Process for Developing a Social Media Strategy

Step 1: Discovery

Using social media is not a goal or a strategy; it’s a tactic. So the first question is: which of your program goals and strategies can be advanced through social media? Some specific questions you should consider are:

- Which audience segments do we specifically want to reach?
- What social media tools are they likely to use?
- What tools/channels are available?
- Are we duplicating existing resources or filling a void?
- What are the expected outcomes (specific, measureable goals)?
- What resources do we have? Who will manage our social media accounts? What funding, if any, is available?

Step 2: Community Analysis

If you are requesting a new account, this analysis needs to be included along with your request. [See Appendix A for a template.](#)

If you determine that you have a strategic use for social media and the ability to create and maintain these channels, you next need to focus carefully on the most important element in communications: the audience. List and carefully define your key audiences, including any history of how you have reached them and continue to do so, including any current use of social media.

Next look at social media analytics, which helps us know how certain messages perform across specific channels. Analytics will help you better understand your audience and ways to reach them. They also help you see which conversations are already taking place in the online space and can allow you to determine how best to participate.

For example, if many of your grantees are already on Facebook and networking with one another, you may want to consider a Facebook page. You can then measure the success of Facebook promotion by monitoring referral URLs via site analytics.

Gather analytics to measure the following in social media channels:

Participation

What social media does your audience use, and how much traffic are you currently getting from social media?

- Which social media channels reach the largest segment of your target audience(s)?
- Which relevant social media channels have the most **active** audiences?
- What specific target audiences are using which specific social media channels? How and how often are they participating/communicating/sharing?
- What topics are of most interest to your target audiences? What are the most visited posts or articles?
- How often do social media channels drive traffic to the ACF website?
- Are any sites or social media entities regularly referencing your materials?
- Several free or low-cost options are available to track metrics specific to the desired social media channels ex. Facebook Insights.
- Search terms: what drives people to your site or social media channel now?

Social Media Influencers

Social Media Influencers have established credibility in their field, have large audiences, and can persuade others because of their authenticity and reach.

- Identify potential influencers
- How many people are following them?
- How many external links point to their sites?
- How many comments do their blog posts attract?
 - For both Search Terms & Influencers, Google Alerts can be a useful tool. It allows you to set up keyword searches for the Bank and receive email or RSS-fed updates. Combined with [iGoogle](#), you can create a consolidated page that contains the latest findings for your selected keywords.

Sentiment

Are people currently saying positive or negative things about your program?

- There are many helpful tool for this. Tools that measure sentiment crawl social media platforms, blogs, web, news, images and more to track mentions and gauge how people talk about your topic or program.

Volume

How much are people talking about your work?

Tools are also available that measure participation, reach, sentiment, passion, and strength (volume/day) across various social media channels

Once you've compiled a thorough Community Analysis, complete a review of your current social media efforts. The Community Analysis should be submitted along with your Engagement Plan (see Step 4).

Step 3: Goal Setting

Once you have identified and analyzed your audiences and current social media efforts, set goals for your new channels. Social media goals should be broad descriptions of general intentions that support your mission and related strategic communications efforts.

Objectives should support specific goals and be S.M.A.R.T.

- Specific
- Measurable
- Attainable
- Relevant
- Time-bound

Establishing goals and objectives will help set marks that can be tracked and measured and allows you to react quickly when social media efforts do not meet expectations. Consider how you will measure success. What tools will you use? What will be your benchmarks for success? How will you adjust if you do not meet these benchmarks?

Example:

- **Goal:** "Increase reach and engagement on social media."
- **Measurable Objective:** "We aim to increase reach by gaining 100 followers a week by the end of the calendar year."

Keep your goals on hand as a reference when developing your Engagement Plan.

Step 4: Engagement Plan

If you are requesting a new account, this analysis needs to be included along with your request. [See Appendix B for a template.](#)

You should create an engagement plan for each channel you want to use. Include a content strategy, channel strategy, and campaign strategy that demonstrates how you will sustain your social media efforts.

Step 5: Management, Metrics & Measurement Strategy

In addition to monitoring social media activity through metrics, it is important to manage social media content. Tools are available that manage social media across various platforms.

Though it is important to use the right analytics and management tools, it's even more important to monitor and track social media traffic and make strategic decisions based on these analytics.

Things to consider:

- How will objectives be measured?
- What goals will be assigned and reported on?
- What are our long-term monitoring needs?

Some metrics you may want to measure:

- Conversions
- Subscribers: Every site is encouraged to offer and track RSS as well as email subscriptions like blogs do. Your subscribers are the most important users of any channel, since they directly receive and share your information.
- Bookmarks
- Engagement:
 - Likes
 - Comments
 - Shares
 - Clicks on your posts/profile
 - Video views

This list is by no means exhaustive! Measure any and all metrics that will help to inform your social media work. Be specific about metrics and how you'll use them.

Step 6: Training & Implementation

In this final step, you'll want to take training to be sure you know the best practices of your chosen channels. Much of this can be self-taught, through exploration of the tools or through resources like [Mashable](#).

Once you have defined your goals and developed your plan, train specific individuals or teams to put things in motion. These are the people who will implement the Engagement Plan in a timely manner.

Remember, social media efforts are ongoing and require regular attention to be successful.

Create a brief marketing plan. This involves deciding how to promote your channel and get the word out to your audiences.

Best Practices by Channel

Facebook

- Update regularly—at least twice a day at times targeted to your audience. Usually, mid-morning and late afternoon are good times to post.
- Use high-quality, engaging photos or infographics, whenever possible
- Ask questions that invite discussion.
- Reuse and re-post high performing content. If you have important content, share it often. Just don't cut and paste it into the same post again and again. Frame it in a new way, linking to the information you want to share. Follow it up with a question designed to create conversation.
- Don't over-post. If you're posting too often, your audience may feel spammed, rather than engaged.
- Leverage Facebook Stories to boost engagement and up the “urgency factor” due to their 24-hour availability.
- Respond! Responses are key to audience engagement. Audiences will quickly realize if you are a one-sided pusher of information. If a direct message or wall post doesn't seem appropriate, respond in a future post—address questions or point people to additional information.

LinkedIn

- Establish groups for various audiences so they can participate in discussions that are unique to them
- Host discussions/forums for members to pose questions, share best practices, etc.
- Publish research, news, and resources
- Share career opportunities
- Create connections with grant recipients/TTA providers to increase your reach

Instagram

- Share consistently high-quality images and videos with cohesive color combinations and visual styles that fit your brand and instantly attract your audience.
- Use industry- or brand-specific hashtags that boost content discovery and help your content stand out.
- Stay on top of the latest Instagram trends and features because the platform is constantly evolving, which means you should as well.
- Tell visual stories about your topic or program
- Feature Instagram Stories to show a little more personality, day-to-day content or personal tidbits about your program or topic. Stories live on your profile for only 24 hours and can include photos or video clips with music, text, GIFs, or stickers layered on.
- Use social media analytics to get insights about what kind of content your audiences like to interact with.
- Maximize engagement with games, contests, and challenges to encourage followers to like, share, and/or comment on posts.

X (Formerly Twitter)

- Respond to tweets mentioning your handle, even if not directly (share information that would answer a question, for instance)
- Engage in other outreach to approved influencers (Following, Replies, Direct Messages, etc.)

- Engage in Twitter chats, as appropriate, with message objectives
- Develop hashtags for conferences, trainings, etc. so that people can find you more easily and follow your conversations
- Consider using Twitter as a tool to encourage questions and conversation during events and conferences
- Ask questions that invite discussion
- Use selected analytics to inform greater external online communications strategy

YouTube

- Post all videos to the main ACF YouTube channel
- Provide keyword-rich descriptions that offer insight to what your video is about including relevant hashtags
- Avoid videos of “talking heads.” No more than 30 seconds of “talking head” before cutting to a graphic or slide.
- Keep videos short—3 minutes is idea for holding a viewer’s attention span.
- Embed or share videos as links on other social channels, like Instagram, LinkedIn, Facebook, and X (formerly Twitter).

Appendix A: Social Media Community Analysis

You'll want to include the following in your community analysis. [See Step 2 for further details.](#)

Participation

What social media does your audience use, and how much traffic are you currently getting from social media?

Social Media Influencers

Social Media Influencers have established credibility in their field, have large audiences, and can persuade others because of their authenticity and reach.

Sentiment

Are people currently saying positive or negative things about your program?

Volume

How much are people talking about your work?

Appendix B: Social Media Engagement Planning

Once you've identified the channel(s) you'd like to use, create a social media plan. You'll want to include the following in your plan.

Mission & Purpose

Identify the mission of your program or initiative and how the following plan will support that mission.

Audience

Identify your target audience and any secondary audiences that you hope to engage.

How do you currently interact with your target audience? Where does your audience engage online?

Goals & Objectives

Identify specifically what you want to accomplish through the plan that follows and how the (S.M.A.R.T.) objectives provide value to your program and your audience.

Messaging

Identify any key messages that are important to highlight through your campaign.

Tools & Channels

Identify the tools or channels that you will use, and explain why these are the best selection for your purpose and audience.

Roles & Responsibilities

Determine who is on your team, who is responsible for what, and any other teams or individuals you will need to work with to begin your work and maintain it over time.

Processes & Procedures

Identify any standards or relevant workflows for producing content, such as clearance, AP style, editorial reviews, and submission for posting.

Technical Requirements

Identify any new technical requirements that you will need to set up and manage your plan.

Timeline/ Calendar

Determine how often you will produce and post new content and if you can plan ahead for major milestones, holidays, or events.

Standards & Policies

Identify the standards and policies that are relevant to the tools and tactics to be used, and how you will ensure you will meet any requirements.

Promotion

Explain how you will promote your efforts, cross promote over other available channels, and leverage partner channels

Evaluation

Identify how you will determine if your efforts are successful and what level and frequency of reporting will allow you to track your progress and make improvements.