USING SOCIAL MEDIA TO PROMOTE YOUR MESSAGE

Social media can be a great way to promote your organization and spread your message to the people you wish to serve, partner organizations and the community. However, there are some important questions for you and your organization to consider which can help you determine if social media is worth your time and investment.

**What is your goal?**

Know your goal and be clear about your intent. For example:

- Is your intent to provide advocacy or to promote events that raise awareness?
- Do you want people to take action – sign a petition, attend an event?
- Are you looking at raising awareness about your issue generally or a specific concern?
- Do you want to enhance outreach efforts to the general public or a specific group?

**Who is your audience?**

Identify your target audience. Who you are trying to reach will determine what methods and tools you use, and how to craft your message to engage your audience.

**What medium will accomplish your goal?**

There are many mediums to choose from, depending on your goal and your audience:

- **E-mail.** Sending messages to a group or distribution list is a great way to quickly send information and updates.
- **Blogs.** Creating spaces for public discussion can engage your audience in conversations about topics that matter to you and your organization.
- **Social media (Facebook, MySpace, Twitter).** Millions of people use social media to connect with family and friends, but they’re also connecting with groups and organizations that make a difference in their communities.
- **Media Sharing (YouTube, Vimeo).** Making training videos, commercials, and public service announcements available online is a great way to spread your message online.

**What message will you convey?**

You want your message to be clear, succinct, and memorable. Too much information will overwhelm an audience and information that is too vague will be ignored, so pick strong points that are interesting, timely, and relevant. In this digital age, people are overwhelmed with information so make your message stand out!

**What resources will it take?**

Many online tools are free or inexpensive to use, but what we often don’t factor are time
and energy. Your agency’s capacity to create and maintain online organizing efforts needs to be considered carefully. Online relationships don’t just happen. They need to be cultivated. Just putting up a page does not engage an audience. Outreach and continued presence as well as engaging messaging are essential.

**Evaluate the ‘What If?’**

Finding ways to evaluate your efforts in online activism can be difficult. Define for your agency what success is, and continue an ongoing evaluation of your success goals. Social media tools should be integrated into your overall marketing and communications plan, not looked at as separate from each other. Search the web and you will find many online resources that will guide you in an evaluation process. Check out techsoup.org. They have a great deal of expertise and information for non-profit organizations on social networking and other issues.

**What to post?**

Keep in mind that nothing online is completely private, and once it is posted you can’t take it back! Even if you delete the information it is possible to search archives that could pull up the picture you didn’t get permission to post, or the comment you accidentally posted to your page and immediately removed.

Depending on the social media you use, you can often set privacy and posting settings to filter responses others make before you allow the post to be viewed on your site. It is important to actively monitor your site if you do allow posts so inappropriate posts are taken down or dealt with immediately. So, think about what you are sharing online: Who will be able to see the information? Is it reaching your target audience? Does it represent your organization in a way that enhances the organization or your work?

**Who is allowed to post?**

Because social media is about connection and dialogue, an agency should think through who within the organization is allowed to post and/or respond to discussions, questions, and comments. It’s a good idea to have guidelines on how the moderator will respond to posts, especially if the post is inappropriate or contains sensitive information. Also, most sites have content policies to follow, so make sure you read these policies to ensure posts to your page are in compliance.

**How will you respond to posts?**

If you open the gate and allow friends to post, it is a good idea to have a policy informing your “friends” what the rules or expectations are. This will help cut down on posts that may be off topic, malicious or flame-fanning, contain sensitive or private information, or just be inappropriate. Once you have a policy in place, it is a good idea to post your policy on how you intend to respond and monitor your site.
Assess the Risks

How can posts risk staff and client safety? For example: If you advertise on your site that you offer certain services and also list the location, days and times you will be offering these services, is it likely your employees or the people you serve could be negatively targeted? Abusers could be tipped off that their victims are accessing the listed services and show up to harass or use other tactics to stalk (i.e., slash tires, follow her, continue to call constantly during that time period to impede her participation).

It is important to do our best to inform users on privacy and safety when using these sites, so they can make more informed choices about how they choose to communicate and interact. “Friends” can be survivors, advocates, or friends of friends, but they all need to be aware of the potential dangers so they do not put themselves at risk of being monitored.

Many people who use social networking are unaware of how being a friend on a page can possibly lead to stalking and harassment. Here is an example of a simple safety alert:

**SAFETY ALERT:** If you are in danger, please use a safer computer, or call 911, your local hotline, or the U.S. National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-7233 and TTY 1-800-787-3224. See more technology safety tips here: [http://www.nnedv.org/internetsafety.html](http://www.nnedv.org/internetsafety.html).

Photos

Pictures are a great way to engage friends and share the spirit of the work you are doing. Keep in mind, just like with our newsletters, it is important to get permission from people in the photo before posting it online. Not everyone wants to be “famous.” Someone in the picture could be a survivor in hiding and the picture and its description could give away confidential information. One strategy would be to let everyone know you are taking a photo that might be published in a newsletter or on the Internet. This allows people to opt out of the photo or at least let you know they do not want the photo circulated.

Survivors & Social Media

Often survivors find our organizational sites and ask to be “friends.” Survivors may wish to share information about themselves or others on your social networking site. Depending on the details and information shared, sharing personal stories on a social network page may open the survivor and owner of the site to legal action. Survivors should be informed of the safety and legal risks associated with sharing personal information online. Follow the policy guidelines you have in place on what others can post on your site.

We strongly suggest programs do NOT solicit information about abuse or conduct counseling or advocacy using social networks. However, because social networks can be an access point for survivors to reach out, programs should include hotline numbers, contact information and Web site links in their profiles.

*Adapted by Lindsee Acton from 2 “Post” Or Not 2 “Post,” a PowerPoint presentation created by Teresa Atkinson for the Technology Safety Project of the Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence, 2008.*