

Setting Guidelines for your Staff and Communities Online

In this ever-changing landscape of new social media platforms, many organizations hesitate navigating the waters for fear they will lose control of the boat. It's important to set clear guidelines for your staff through an internal social media policy and for your community of supporters through an external social media comment policy so everyone is clear about their roles and expected behavior.

Establish a Team

A good social media policy should protect the organization while at the same time respect its staff. Think about who from your organization needs a seat at the table for this discussion. Ideally, members of your executive staff, communications or digital team, legal, finance and human resources all have a voice in the process. It's important that the team as a whole develop and then roll out the plan so everyone understands how decisions were made and buy in to the policy.

Formal or Informal?

There are no set rules for what a policy should contain. The question is up to your organization. Here are some questions to consider:



- Should it be a very detailed description with examples of the type of posts that are okay and not okay to post online?
- Should it be a strategy to help others think through what's appropriate?
- Will it only govern the organization's social media channels or are you producing guidelines for your staff's personal networks as well?

If your organization is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, it is important to consult with your attorney about what is permissible for your staff to post on their personal channels using organizational computers and cellphones. Whether informal or formal, it's smart to have all staff members sign the policy saying they have read it and understand the repercussions if they do not follow it.

Make Decisions

Take a look at your organization's values and think about how those values play out online. This will help you decide the personality the organization adopts online, the tactics it uses to respond to positive, neutral and negative comments and other answers to necessary questions. Make sure to answer these questions:



- Who will have access to the organization's social media accounts?
- What happens when the person who used their email to create a social media account for the organization leaves? (Note: It's important to instruct creators of an organizational account to use their work email when setting up the account and to transfer ownership of the account to a current employee when they depart the organization)
- Who is responsible for researching, creating and posting content on social media?
- What is the appropriate tone for the organization's social media profiles?
- What is appropriate vs. inappropriate content for the organization's social media accounts? Pay close attention to the laws governing your organization's 501(c)(3) nonprofit status.
- What is appropriate vs. inappropriate content for staff members to share in regards to their work at the organization?





- Who is responsible for monitoring staff's social media accounts and their adherence to the policy? Is this a necessary activity?
- What are the consequences if staff members disobey the policy and who will enforce it?
- What is the organization's response strategy for negative comments about the organization or its leadership?
- What is the organization's strategy for responding to positive and neutral messages? (e.g. How will you promote these to your target audiences and networks?)
- What should the privacy and permissions policy be for sharing potentially sensitive information?
- Do you have permission to share photos of your events? Consider having photo permission slips at all events and don't post photos of children without their parents' written permission.
- How should others share and not share your content (e.g. Are reports to be shared? Do you have a copyright policy that needs to be included in this policy?)
- Certain members of your staff and leadership may be influential offline and perhaps online. How can they contribute to an organization's success on social media? (e.g. Should staff be required to add the organization's social media links to their professional email signature? Should they be required to retweet the organization's tweets to their networks?)

Define the Rules for Your Community

Social media platforms allow us to communicate with each other and connect in real time. At the same time, because we aren't face to face, there is also a sense of anonymity that can result in people letting their emotions get the best of them. Establishing simple yet definitive guidelines for your supporters and opponents on each platform provides a way for you to share and exchange thoughts, ideas, images, and other content in a respectful way that fosters constructive dialogue.

Consider these sample points when drafting your rules and make it clear that you reserve the right to delete comments or restrict a user access to the page if they do not adhere to them. Be sure to publish this public policy on your channels so that you can reference it when and if you need to enforce it.



- Personal attacks are disruptive to healthy dialogue.
- Stereotypes are often divisive and offensive, and any such comment will be monitored closely.
- If comment threads are taken over by trolls, people who post comments specifically to start a fight, defame, divide, distract, or otherwise detract from the overall function of the community; we ask that the community refrain from responding.
- Avoid minimizing or denying the importance of comments/posts from others.
- Do not use this social media community for self-promotion.
- Please do not use the comments section to air complaints, whether about a post, a particular comment, or the moderation of our page.