

CREATING A SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY



Setting Guidelines for your Staff and Communities Online. In this ever-changing social media landscape, many organizations hesitate navigating the waters for fear they will lose control of the boat. 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) to make sure that everyone is clear about roles and expectations.



Establish a Team

A good social media policy should protect the organization and its staff. Think about which members of your staff should get a seat at the table. Ideally, members of your executive staff, communications or digital team, legal, finance and human resources all get a voice in the process. Involve the team in both the development and rollout of the plan to make sure that team members understand and buy into the policy.

Formal or Informal?

There are no set rules for what a policy should contain. Here are some questions to consider:

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



Make Decisions

If your organization is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, 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, have all staff members sign the policy acknowledging that they have read the policy and understand the repercussions if they break its terms.

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

- 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 the organization? (Note: 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,)
- 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 regarding 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 strategy for responding to 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 responses to your target audiences and networks?)
- What is your privacy and permissions policy 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 parental written permission.
- How should others share your content (e.g. Can reports 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 online and off. How can they contribute to your 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? Is staff expected to retweet the organization's tweets to their personal networks?)

Define the Rules for Your Community

Social media platforms allow us to communicate with each other and connect in real time. Simultaneously, because we aren't face to face, there is a sense of anonymity that can result in people letting their emotions control 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 be clear that you reserve the right to delete comments or restrict user access to the page for violating stated norms. Be sure to publish this public policy on your channels so that you can reference the policy when and if you need to enforce it.

- Personal attacks are disruptive to healthy dialogue.
- Stereotypes can be divisive and offensive and such comments will be monitored closely.
- We ask that the community refrain from responding 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 purpose of the community.
- 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 about a post, a particular comment, or the moderation of our page.

