



Social Media Toolkit



What Is Social Media?

Social media is a digital (electronic) means of connecting with friends and family members to share special moments or thoughts in the form of words or media, such as photos. Social media platforms are web-based applications that blend technology with social interaction and allow individuals to connect with one another in networks and communities, often organized around specific issues or interests. Social media also has become an important, quick, easy, and cost-effective way that elected officials and other public figures engage with the public and their constituents.

Social media can be categorized in terms of content:



Communication-focused:

- Blogs & Microblogs (blogger, Tumblr)
- Social Networks (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn)
- Online Advocacy & Fundraising (Causes, Kickstarter, Twibbon)



Multimedia-focused:

- Photosharing (Flickr, Instagram)
- Videosharing (Youtube, Vimeo, Vine)
- Livestreaming (Ustream)
- Musicsharing (Last.fm, Soundcloud)



Others:

- Reviews/Opinions, Entertainment (Yelp!, Pinterest)

Why Is Social Media Important to Advocacy?

Social media:

- Has become a new way we all speak to—and with—each other, offering a no-cost way of breaking down barriers of time, location, and distance.
- Is a great way to discover new people and find new information.
- Is dynamic and allows for exchange of information—the people with whom you are connected via social media are a resource for you and you can be a resource to them!
- Platforms allow you to meet other people—across the nation and all around with world—with whom you have commonalities.
- Provides an easy and convenient way to share ideas and find others who feel or think as you do.
- Empowers you to amplify and strengthen your voice and have your ideas and actions resonate in an echo chamber reinforced by others.
- Provides direct, two-way communication between individuals, communities, organizations, policymakers, and media.
- Is highly and immediately visible—with one “click” you can reach thousands of people—and within seconds you can receive instant feedback (e.g., likes, favorites, retweets).

Elected Officials and Social Media

- The First Amendment gives you the right to petition the government for a redress of grievances.
- In the 19th century, legislators traveled by horse to and from Washington, D.C. and their constituents used postal mail, which sometimes took weeks for delivery, to communicate their views to their elected officials.
- Nearly every Member of Congress has some form of social media presence, in addition to traditional means of communication, such as phone, postal mail, and email.
- Now in a matter of seconds, a Member of Congress can hear directly from a constituent who has a grievance—through a social media site, airing the complaint in the “new town square.”

You and Your Elected Official



Members of Congress and their staff have numerous systems in place to receive messages, information, and other input from constituents, and they rely on the communications from their constituents to help inform their work.

You may think because you are not a lobbyist or a subject matter expert that your elected officials and their staff may not value your opinion – that is wrong! You are expert in the issues that matter most to you and your family, and your personal story is powerful.

Elected officials value personal narratives more than data and statistics.

Members of Congress and their staff work on virtually every issue imaginable—including taxes, foreign policy, commerce, health care, energy, homeland security, environment, agriculture, arcane Congressional rules, budgets, etc.; they cannot be expert in all of these issues and need to hear from constituents who know the facts and can explain personally why Congress needs to take a particular action.

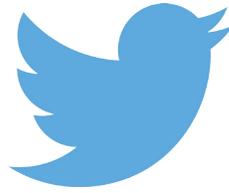
Combining other advocacy communication tools with social media gives your efforts an extra boost. An in-person meeting is impactful, a Tweet is powerful, but combining an in-person meeting with a follow-up Tweet is a one-two punch!

Social media provides a powerful way to communicate your priorities to your elected officials and, in the process, to recruit others to the effort!



Twitter Definitions and Tips

Twitter is one of the most popular social media tools utilized by Congress. Most of them actually do the tweeting themselves rather than having their staff do it.



What Is Twitter and How Does it Work?

- To begin to Tweet – you first must create an account with a unique name or “handle,” which begins with the “@” sign (e.g., @JoanSmith12, @ResearchAdvocate).
- You can add a photo and short “bio” description (one or two sentences) to accompany your Twitter profile and handle, which helps people know who you are and gives them information about why they should “follow” you.



- Twitter is dynamic and “mutual”—you choose people and organizations to “follow” and people and organizations choose to “follow” you; following is just subscribing to a particular Twitter feed.
- When you Tweet, your “followers” see what you are saying/sharing.
- You can Tweet anytime you wish and as frequently as you desire—some people post messages (Tweet) occasionally while others Tweet constantly.
- You can check your “feed” (the timeline listing of all the messages of all the people and organizations you follow) as frequently or infrequently as you wish. Your feed constantly refreshes and moves forward in time—so you don’t need to worry about deleting anything like you do with email.

- There is no intermediary or anyone refereeing Twitter, but the platform does allow feedback opportunities as followers can illustrate their agreement or approval by “favoriting” a Tweet, retweeting your message (which means they send out your Tweet to their followers), or responding to a Tweet with encouraging (or discouraging) words.
- There are no fees associated with Twitter—you do not need to pay to participate—making it a very cost-effective communication tool!

Why Should I Use Twitter?

- As noted earlier, virtually all Members of Congress utilize Twitter to communicate with their constituents.
- It is immediate, news breaks faster, and your message reverberates with other passionate advocates within moments.
- The barrier of entry is very low; you can get started very quickly, and there is really no “maintenance” of your account necessary. Unlike other networking sites, you need not enter a lot of information about yourself or “manage” it; just pick a handle/username, post a photo, write a one to two sentence bio about yourself, and you can now post a 140 character statement about the need for research funding, passage of a particular bill or any other topic about which you are passionate!
- Think of Twitter as an exciting cocktail gathering of millions where you can meet and discuss anything with new/different people at any time. Possibilities are virtually endless!!

Download Twitter to Your Smartphone!

You can complete all of the above-mentioned on your smartphone if you’d prefer.

- Download Twitter for iPhone on the Apple iTunes App Store for free.
- Download Twitter for Android on Google Play for free.
- Share photos and videos with your followers!

Senate

100

All 100 Senators have a Twitter account

House

90%

More than 90% of the House of Representatives have a Twitter account

Keep in Mind:

- Twitter is very fast paced, which makes it sometimes difficult to keep up if you are away from your feed for periods of time.
- Twitter only provides you enough space for 140 characters, which includes letters, numbers, characters, and photo URL web addresses. Crafting a clear message with very few characters sometimes can be challenging!
- Tweets are archived and can never be truly deleted. So be sure you really want to say it before you Tweet it—you cannot “take it back” once you post it.

Twitter Glossary and Tips

RT/MT = ReTweet/Modified Tweet

- You can expand someone else's reach by communicating a Member or advocate's Tweet through a "quote" (only available on mobile devices).
- You help create an echo chamber by sharing others' messages and/or having your Tweets retweeted and/or modified and sent around.

= Hashtag

- Putting a "#" before a word is a way to connote a keyword or priority concept and makes it a searchable item for others.
- Communities often use or create "hashtags" so that likeminded individuals can find one another and each others' messages on Twitter - #supportNIHfunding.

@ = Mention

- A mention is when you include in one of your Tweets the handle/name of another person or organization or another person or organization uses your handle/name in their Tweet. For example, if you Tweet: "ICYMI: via @JoanSmith12 Rep. Gerlach was very receptive to my questions during the town hall. Thank you!"—your inclusion of @JoanSmith12 got a "mention" in your Tweet. If @JoanSmith12 replies to your Tweet and includes your name, you have gotten a mention. Example: "Thanks @JoanSmith12 for your great questions during my town hall—glad you came with me!"
- Try not to start a Tweet with a handle (@ResearchAdvocate), as that is considered a Direct Message (DM) – if you cannot work around it be sure to use a period before the mention if you want all your followers to see it. Example: ".@ResearchAdvocate thanks for the town hall questions - I hope to be able to attend Rep. Schwartz's town hall!"
- Try not to use all 140 characters so your followers can retweet you and/or add a comment to a modified Tweet or "quote."

#FF = Follow Friday or Follow Friends

- Promote other advocates by encouraging your friends to follow them. This will widen your reach and your message as well as that of your friends and family. For example, to give a shout out to a group of people doing good work on NIH funding you could Tweet: "Great NIH funding advocates helping the cause #FF @johnsmith @jodiesmith @davidsmith".

ICYMI = In Case You Missed It

- A way to gently remind your followers without Tweeting the same content repeatedly in a short period of time. This is a great way to allow other followers to see what you are saying or find important information. Example, "ICYMI: Research Group 12 is hosting a twitter chat next month. @JoanSmith12 will lead."

Eggs = stock photos

- Egg avatars (which appear if you have not uploaded a profile picture) can be confused for fake accounts or someone who is inactive, so be sure to take a minute to post a photo. Also, once people are following you, your photo becomes your "brand"—it is the visual cue for your followers to look at your Tweets in their feeds, so keep your avatar ("avi") consistent!

Anatomy of a Tweet

What is said...



A hashtag (#) is used to categorize Tweets. It optimizes searches and links the Tweet to the larger conversation.

To link to a website, use a shortened URL to fit in the 140 character limit.

A mention (@), engages other Tweeters in the conversation and shows in their feed.

...and what is meant



Facebook Definitions and Tips



- Facebook is a social network of your friends, coworkers, neighbors, and family members.
- Facebook allows you, through your “profile,” to share photos, thoughts, and articles through status updates, and comment on those items within your networks to all of your “friends.”
- You can create networks of “friends” like your school, family, work place, etc.
- There are no space limits, so you can post messages that are as long or as short as you like.
- You can communicate with your networks in a closed forum and modify your “privacy settings” to control who sees what items you post.
- Members of Congress also use Facebook to hear from their constituents, communicate their priorities, and inform the public of events and town halls. Some Members of Congress use Facebook postings in lieu of issuing standard press releases.
- You can comment and engage these “pages” once you “like” each one.
- Facebook is like a gathering of family and friends at a party. There are a multitude of opportunities to engage and interact around a number of matters but most of the people there are people you already know. Facebook is a more intimate platform as opposed to an open resource like Twitter.

Keep in Mind:

- Slower to communicate with a wide audience.
- You can comment and post only after “liking” a “page.”
- Limited to the network of people who have added you as a “friend.”
- With respect to advocacy, Facebook is less focused on a message and more about events and people.

General Social Media Tips

- Just like you do at work and with your family, keep your tone and content civil and clean. The internet can be a hateful place, filled with vitriol—and nothing brings this out more than politics. Make sure you do not play a part in this, either by starting it or engaging in it.
- There is nothing to be gained from engaging in controversial discussions or negative exchanges regarding politics; these types of conversations, if you participate in them, likely will muddy your overall message and make you a persona non grata with your elected officials, when your goal is building relationships and to be a trusted and respected advocate.
- Would you want your grandmother to see it or have it on the front page of the Washington Post? If the answer is no, then best not to post it or say it.
- Particularly if you are using social media for advocacy on a personal topic that is very important to you, you want to remain professional and appropriate.
- If you are using social media just to push out your message, you are not using it to its fullest potential. Be sure also to reply to interesting Tweets and comment on Facebook posts, keeping in mind tips 1 & 2. You cannot expand your social media reach without getting involved and following or “friending” a good number of people.
- Include social media in all your advocacy activities. Social media should be built in to all advocacy activity these days. Be sure to Tweet a thank you or a photo after you attend a meeting with an elected official or their staff. If you are attending a town hall meeting, an advocacy day, or other event, announce it on Facebook so any friends who might be interested also can sign up or add their voices to the cause.
- Sometimes you may not want to send a message via Twitter to all your followers or all the followers of someone you follow—in those cases you want to send a Direct Message (DM), which will go only to the person you wish to reach.

Get Online!! Get Tweeting and Facebooking!!

It can seem daunting or intimidating at first, but once you get started, social media is easy, fun, and helps boost the visibility of the issues important to you and what we want from our elected officials in Washington! We are excited to see the creative ways in which you tell your story and amplify these important issues. Just keep in mind the tips we have provided and get going!

- www.Twitter.com is a great place to begin.
- Twitter will suggest people and organizations for you to follow based on areas of interests. There will be a series of lists: news outlets, prominent figures in entertainment and sports, some elected officials and government agencies, or healthcare nonprofit advocacy organizations. Once you start following them, their Tweets will show up on your home page or “feed.”
- Be sure to follow @DistrictPolicy so we can keep you informed about our advocacy on behalf of you and other advocates.
- Share your handle on Facebook and LinkedIn so you can let your friends and colleagues know about your new online account so they can follow you, retweet you, mention you, Direct Message (DM) you, etc.
- Be sure to follow your elected officials on Twitter—you can find their handles on their websites at www.house.gov and www.senate.gov.
- Want to Tweet a message directly at all your elected officials at once? www.soundoffatcongress.org allows you to do it with ease.

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