NACDD Strategic Communications Subcommittee
Social Media Communications Brief
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Contents

How social media can be used to enhance the work of DD Councils

The foundation of social media is social networking which utilizes many different platforms designed to make it easy for people to connect. Social media platforms include websites and applications (also known as "apps") that allow users to share useful and relevant content in a timely manner, expand their audience, and network with others.

Some social media platforms are designed to share content "in the moment," so the platforms are very easy to use and oftentimes optimized to be used on a mobile device (smartphone or tablet). Most social media platforms can be used on a laptop or desktop computer as well.

The platforms allow users to share text, website links, images, videos and more. Facebook and Twitter allow all of these, while YouTube is primarily for videos and Instagram is primarily for photos. Social media platforms can also be used to drive traffic back to DD Council websites and/or to encourage people to join email lists and receive publications.

Social media allows DD Councils to share important information about:

- disability-related news (state or federal changes to benefits/services),
- advocacy opportunities (state agency public meetings and legislative hearings),
- DD Council updates (announcements of meetings, recruit members, grants available, job postings, policy initiatives, share new resources), and
- other relevant items (conferences, other news and resources, etc.).

Each DD Council serves people across their entire state or territory and social media can help Councils connect with new people and/or organizations. Every time someone uses social media to share information or resources from a DD Council, its content is made available to an entirely new audience, thus increasing the reach of the message.

Where to begin: Try using this tool provided by the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services to critically think about which social media platform/s are right for your DD Council. [(Social Media Considerations)](#)

Keep in mind, the resources and information provided in this brief are not a substitute for knowing and following specific requirements and policies set forth by each State or Territory and any additional requirements by the Administration on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities.

State regulations, compliance and policies

Every State has different social media policies. Some States might have a statewide or departmental policy while others have developed their own. Here are examples from three different Developmental Disability Councils across the country, along with the contact person for each state.

It is important to look at all three documents as it relates to the policy as a whole. **Michigan** has a departmental and statewide social media policy. They have guidelines they have to follow as well as a format for their social media pages. For example, social media administrators must post 1-2 times per day. For style, social media pages must have the agency's logo as the profile picture. Below are links to Social Media Policy and Standards.

Social Media Standard

Social Media Directory and Style guide

> *For more information, contact: Meredith Smith, smithm10@michigan.gov*

Tennessee has an internal process for determining what content is posted to its Facebook page. For example, their Facebook posts include information about grant funding deadlines, events, links to publications and reports, and Council meeting dates.

Tennessee DD Council Social Media Strategic Plan

> *For more information, contact: Emma Shouse, emma.shouse@tn.gov*

Minnesota had to submit a purpose for their Facebook Page (along with every other state agency in Minnesota) to their Designated State Agency (DSA). They also have to follow a State statute about websites and a Linking Policy. Below is a copy of their social media policy.

Minnesota DD Council Social Media Policy

> *For more information, contact: Colleen Wieck, colleen.wieck@state.mn.us*

General DD Council Tools and tips for using Facebook, Twitter, blogs and more

There are many online social media outlets available for Councils to use. Most are free and are easy to set-up. Whether you choose one or many social media outlets to use, the key to success is regularly updating your social media sites and encouraging interaction from your audience. The following are several of the most commonly used social media outlets and how to get started with using them.

Facebook

Facebook is considered the most popular online social network. State guidelines permitting, a Council can develop a "Facebook Page" to share information and connect with people and organizations. Like personal Facebook profiles, you can customize Pages by publishing stories, hosting events, adding apps and more. People who "Like" your Page will get updates on their personal News Feed when you post to your page.

You must have a personal Facebook profile in order to create and manage a Page. When you do this, you become the Administrator of the Page. You can assign different levels of Administrator privileges to others who will manage the Page. Please note that the people who "Like" your Page will not see who the Administrators are of the Page.

- Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/business/learn/set-up-facebook-page

Twitter

Twitter enables people to send and read short 140-character messages called "tweets." Registered users can read and post tweets; unregistered users can only read them. A useful feature of Twitter is the ability to automatically post the tweet directly to your Facebook Page.

You can use the hashtag symbol # before a relevant keyword or phrase (no spaces) in your tweet to categorize it. This helps the tweet to more readily appear in Twitter Search results. For example, if you tweet about DD Awareness Month, you can assign #ddaware to the end of the tweet. When a person clicks on the hashtag, they will see all other tweets marked with that particular hashtag. Note, hashtag symbols can be used on Facebook as well.

- Twitter: https://support.twitter.com/categories/281#

YouTube

YouTube is a video-sharing website. DD Councils can create their own YouTube "channel" to post videos of events, grantee activities, presentations, and more in one place – it's like a library of videos produced by your Council. YouTube offers a captioning feature so that your videos can have a closed-caption option.

- YouTube: https://support.google.com/youtube/answer/1646861?hl=en

Google+ Pages

Setting up a Google+ Page is similar to a Facebook Page. Although not as popular as Facebook, Google+ pages are highlighted in Google's search results as a location page which contains information about your organization, such as address, map of location and description of services. Even if you have not created a Google+ Page, Google usually already has one set up for your organization using publicly available information. This makes it important to create or customize your page to ensure that the information is correct.

Just like Facebook, people can choose to follow your Google+ page which includes being added to "Circles." Circles allow people to organize Google+ pages into groups or lists for sharing with others. Just like Facebook, you can post messages, links and photos. If you have a YouTube Channel, Google+ Page will also link directly to it.

- Google+: https://plus.google.com/

Tips to Optimize the Use of Social Media

- Be consistent when developing your logo and content for your sites. Follow your Council's "brand image" by using your official logo, color scheme, and overall message.

- Include links to your social media sites in all your communication materials, such as staff members email signatures, Council publications, letterhead and on the Council's website. You can also embed live feeds from Facebook and Twitter onto your website's home page.

- Include your website address on your social media sites and post links to articles and information that go to your website. This is a powerful way to drive "traffic" to your website and increase visitors.

- Most social media sites provide analytics of how people view and use your site. Reviewing these statistics helps you to gauge the effectiveness of your site and can help you think of ideas for improvement.

- Consider using a social media management tool, such as HootSuite (https://hootsuite.com/). This tool consolidates and distributes your messages among your multiple social media outlets. Many of the email marketing programs, such as Constant Contact (http://www.constantcontact.com/) also provide features that promote and cross-post to social media outlets.

This brief covers the more popular social media outlets used by organizations. Others to consider include Pinterest, Instagram, SlideShare, LinkedIn, and text-to-subscribe services.

Maintenance and staffing

Staff time & commitment

- Nearly 2/3 of adults in America today use social networking sites; allocating resources to leverage social media should not be considered optional.

- The amount of staff time a given Council chooses to devote should reflect the communication and outreach goals and objectives of the Council.

- Of those Councils surveyed, 68% reported spending 1-8 hours per week on social media with 24% reporting 9-20 hours.

Deciding on content/approval process

- Nine percent (9%) of Councils surveyed indicated that they used a formal review process.

- Thirty-nine percent (39%) use an informal review process, while an additional 39% of Councils assign staff to create content and allow the freedom to post at will.

- If social media is to be used effectively it should be used as a strategic tool. It is recommended that Councils identify staff to be accountable for execution of a social media strategy that aligns content with Council goals and objectives as well as mission for general branding purposes.

- Once staff are identified, trained and oriented to mission and content objectives, the degree of formality of approval is a management question dependent on the culture of each Council.

- Whatever approval process is appropriate, it should be nimble so as to ensure content is fresh and the Council maintains a current, dynamic presence in each State.

Additional Resource Links

ARTICLES on SOCIAL MEDIA CONTENT and MARKETING

- Social Media Examiner - content
  http://www.socialmediaexaminer.com/26-tips-to-create-a-strong-social-media-content-strategy/

- Guide for Creating a Social Media Platform – What's in a Plan
  http://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/web/socialmedia/getting_started/whats_in_a_plan.pdf

TOOLS for ANALYZING DATA

Here is a list of free tools that you can use to analyze and see engagement for your social media sites. Some of the tools are free but others require a contract or fee.

These are used to monitor mentions and comments on Twitter:

- Topsy
- Mention
- Argyle social
- Commun.it
- Google Alerts
- Social Mention

Facebook:

- Like Alyzer
- "Insights" are automatically included for analyzing data on your Facebook page

ACCESSIBILITY and DIVERSITY

- Facebook Accessibility Features - https://www.facebook.com/help/141636465971794/

- Reaching and Engaging Diverse Audiences https://www.govdelivery.com/resources/reaching-and-engaging-diverse-audiences-2/

- Designing for Inclusion - http://www.w3.org/WAI/users/Overview.html