

Using Social Media to Advocate for Change

The use of social media as an advocacy tool has significantly increased in the past several years with non-profits, labor unions, grassroots movements, and civic groups. It is a powerful tool that is changing the way people absorb information, mobilize, and raise awareness on issues. Almost half of the world's population has some form of social media – around 3.2 billion people! The most popular social media sites include Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.

Social media can help your community's membership grow and draw attention to your work (and website). You can share articles, breaking news, event information, pictures, videos, and more. Social media has helped new justice movements gain traction and continues to bring awareness to ongoing issues as seen with #MeToo and #BlackLivesMatter. It is also now easier than ever for elected officials to hear the views and opinions of real folks back home on how legislation or regulations impact their lives because of social media.

Getting Started

Signing up for platforms such as Facebook or Twitter is a fairly simple process if you're starting a new account for yourself, your organization, or your faith community. As you begin, give plenty of thought to what you will name your page or account. Once you open and name the account, you may not be able to change it without losing your account's followers and connections. Make sure that you have designated who will be the primary user of the account if you are setting it up for your community or organization. Keep track of the login information and distribute it only to people you trust so that the information to your social media accounts does not get lost or end up in the wrong hands.

Once you are on a social media site, do not feel compelled to immediately start posting content. If you are unsure of how things work or what sort of content is appropriate for you to post, take some time to get a feel for how the platform works. Check out accounts that are similar to your own and determine what you think does or does not work for you. Think critically about how to make your content concise, compelling, and relevant. Make sure your message is clear when folks tune in. A good way to begin posting while you are still learning how to use the site is to simply share or repost what Faith Action Network (or other groups that you trust) has posted.

Do Not Post

- Endorsements of a political party or candidate on your faith community or non-profit's page. Faith Communities and many nonprofits are generally 501(c)(3)s, which makes them legally nonpartisan. This means they cannot support or endorse any political candidate or party.
- Anything offensive on the basis of race, creed, sexual orientation, gender identity, national origin, religion, disability, age, or any similar grounds. Keep this a safe space. Report other posts if you see hateful or threatening language employed.

Facebook

Organizations and groups use “pages” on Facebook rather than personal profiles. You can create a page from your personal Facebook account. Once established, grant other (designated) leaders of the account editorial access to the page to post on behalf of your community. On your page, you can post photos, news articles, links, videos, and other content, as you interact directly with followers and commenters. Facebook users have the option to “like” your page, which means that the content you share on your page will show up in their news feeds.

More Facebook Tips:

- How often you post is a balancing act. Post too little and your posts are unlikely to end up in your followers’ news feeds. Post too often and your fans may “unlike” you if they feel inundated by content. Try to post once or twice a day. You can schedule posts to upload at later times if you want to space them out a bit more.
- Make it visual. Photos, images, and videos are more engaging than plain text posts. Remember to snap photos at your events or share pictures others have taken (with permission). You can even share live videos! Linking articles gives a thumbnail to posts which helps create a visual.

Twitter

Twitter allows users to share short posts up to 280-characters in length and is an ideal place to share concise, straightforward information. Users can post text, video, images, and links to articles or external sites. Unlike Facebook, there is no difference between setting up a twitter page for individuals or for organizations. Twitter is the preferred network for sharing live information or breaking news. For example, participants can tweet throughout an event to give followers updates, quotes, and quick bits of information about the occasion. This is called live-tweeting!

More Twitter Tips:

- Use #hashtags. Do some research to identify popular hashtags for your posts. Popular hashtags can lead new users to find your post or page. Don’t forget to use local hashtags too! For example, check if there are specific hashtags for state and local elections. Use those existing hashtags to amplify your work and message. You can also create your own hashtags!
- Stay current with Twitter mentions (when other twitter accounts tag you in a post with an @ symbol) and respond to any questions or concerns within a few hours if you are able to.
- Follow accounts interested in similar issues, and local community groups (colleges, high schools, nonprofits, other faith communities, etc.). You can reach out them with links and information about relevant events and programming, and even ask other accounts to retweet (share) your links. Retweets help your message reach entirely new networks.
- Find Twitter accounts for local media or journalists, and tweet them links to your events, announcements, or press releases.
- Engage with elected officials. Twitter is a great way to interact directly with elected officials, who are often very active on the platform. Pushing for legislative action, or looking to thank a politician for their vote? Tag them in a tweet! You can also write a sample tweet and encourage your followers to tweet it and tag the elected official to amplify your message.