Mobilizing through Social Media

The term “social media” encompasses a group of web-based applications that allow for easy sharing of user-generated content. Unlike traditional media outlets, social media can be used by anyone with internet access and is characterized by shorter and faster bursts of information. Social media has become an increasingly widespread tool for connecting individuals with organizations, corporations, products, and government. It can be used to build personal relationships with your members and supporters and to communicate with them practically in real-time. The nearly endless people-to-people connections allow for greater dialogue and dissemination of information than ever before.

While the concept of social media may seem foreign and daunting, online information sharing has been on the rise since the advent of computers. It is likely that your organization has a website and even an online or email newsletter.

Often (and perhaps somewhat surprisingly), the people who receive your newsletter are not the same people who frequent your website, nor are they the same people who are on your social networks. By mobilizing people on all of these different platforms, you can reach a wider audience and help to bridge the gaps between your networks.

The more popular social media sites include the following:
- Facebook
- Twitter
- MySpace
- YouTube
- Flickr

While social media is an ever-expanding and ever-changing landscape, for the purposes of clarity and ease, this toolkit will focus only on Facebook, Twitter, and blogs. As of this printing, 86 percent of nonprofit organizations have a presence on Facebook, and 60 percent have one on Twitter. These three platforms are excellent tools to keep partners, members, and the general public interested and engaged in your organization.

Social Media and Your Organization

If your organization has not yet become involved in social media networks, this section will provide some insight into the basics of these networks and how best to use them.
GETTING STARTED

The social media universe has garnered a large amount of attention in recent years, especially from organizations looking to leverage these communications tools to reach their constituent bases. The prospect of connecting directly with partners and supporters can be quite alluring.

However, before starting your accounts, be sure to consider your organization’s mission and its specific communications and advocacy goals. Remember to ask yourself the following questions:

- What are we trying to achieve on our social networks?
- Why are we choosing social networks over other mediums? Are they somehow better?
- How will we determine the efficacy of our social media efforts? Will we track the number of followers? Tweets? Comments? Actions taken?
- How do these social media efforts fit into our organizational goals and mission?

Once you have answered those questions for yourself and your organization, you will be better equipped to tailor your social media efforts in a more strategic and concerted way.

FACEBOOK

With over 500 million users, Facebook is the largest social network in the world. About 1 in 14 people on the planet have a Facebook profile. There are four ways that an organization can utilize Facebook:

1. **Fan page:** This is the way most organizations have chosen to represent themselves on Facebook (examples include the White House and many nonprofits).

2. **Cause:** This is a fundraising-focused way to represent your organization online and is designed mostly for charitable organizations (including the American Red Cross). While the prospect of connecting with millions of potential donors may seem attractive, the most recent social media survey authored by the Nonprofit Technology Network suggests that, on average, nonprofits raise only about $1,000 on Facebook.

3. **Group:** Facebook recently re-launched a new and improved way to use Facebook Groups. Groups allow you to tailor access (it could be a private group that requires membership approval or a public group that anyone can join) and to identify specific “administrators” to control settings and conversations in the group.

4. **Profile:** This option is great for organizations with charismatic presidents or executive directors. You can create a Facebook profile—just like your own personal profile—for your organization. If you choose to go this route, it is highly advised that you choose a person (likely your president, CEO, or executive director) to be the face of the organization.
TWITTER

Twitter is a much more limited social network involving short (140-character) messages. Anyone, including non-users, can view your “tweets” (your posts on Twitter), and your tweets automatically will display on the homepage of users who subscribe to your posts.

Twitter often is seen as a high-frequency, high-volume social network—many organizations tweet as much as once an hour. Utilizing Twitter also will require an understanding of the platform and its specific norms and culture, including vocabulary. (For example, “RT” means “retweet,” and “handle” refers to your twitter name). While many see Twitter as lacking intimacy, it can foster new person-to-person relationships. People can engage a person or organization directly (by using the @ sign) and have real-time conversations that they would not otherwise be able to have.

BLOGS

Finally, blogs are the most in-depth way on social media to convey information and educate readers. They allow you to focus on specific topics in a less formal or academic way than in papers or on your website. Blogs are also a great place to explain dense policy issues in easy-to-understand ways without explicitly asking readers to take action.

It can be helpful to think of blogs as emails to a close colleague or even a diary (the term “blog” actually comes from the melding of two words: “web” and “log”). The tone is usually more intimate, more honest, and much more casual than standard professional language.

No matter which social media platform(s) you choose to utilize, the most important portion of your profile will be the content you disseminate. Make sure that you select the platform that will best carry the content you wish to share.
When to Use Social Media Networks for Advocacy

The goal of many organizations’ social media networks is to connect with their supporter base. So before your organization begins using social media for advocacy, build up your networks and create an active presence. Supporters can find it discouraging to visit the Facebook fan page of an organization they support and notice that no one has updated it in months. Keeping up an active and daily social network will demonstrate to your followers that your organization is busily making progress.

The same principles that apply to email newsletters and other action alerts also should be applied to your social media networks. Unlike advocacy email lists, followers on your networks have not explicitly expressed interest in policy or advocacy and therefore may become fatigued if you focus too much of your online presence on these issues. Avoid overuse of and over-reliance on your social media networks for advocacy.

Timing of advocacy posts on Facebook and Twitter should correspond to any other advocacy or mobilizing efforts your organization is undertaking. It is critical that all of your mobilizing efforts are coordinated and that there are no mixed messages or variance of asks across outlets. Avoiding these mixed messages makes your organization appear more coordinated and makes a bigger impact, eliminating confusion among people who are following you through multiple avenues.

If an email action alert urges people to take a specific action (such as writing a letter to their Member of Congress), any posts on your social media networks should request that users take the same action.

Blogs—in which posts are usually longer and added less frequently than in other social media—are a great place to supplement your asks and action steps with more background information on the issue and the impact a certain policy or piece of legislation could have. Blog posts do not necessarily need to be related directly to a specific mobilization effort, but may be part of a larger, ongoing effort to educate the public and your networks on federal policy issues.
Effective Mobilizing through Social Media

The same principles that apply to any efforts to mobilize others can and should be applied to your social media networks. When asking people to take action, ensure that they have all of the information they need, including any relevant names, numbers, and data. The less information people need to find on their own, the more likely they are to take action.

Social media networks should be used to enhance your mobilizing efforts elsewhere, not to replace them. They should be used in conjunction with email blasts or phone calls to spread the message to a wider audience.

Because social media networks can be so large, it can be difficult to track advocates’ actions, so it is important to make a concerted effort to monitor steps taken.

Further Ways to Use Social Media to Mobilize

Social media should be used primarily to build a community around your organization and to create a dialogue between your organization and its followers. There are many ways in which you can get people involved in your organization and its activities.

Contests are a great way to mobilize people in your networks. They can be fun and creative, such as a photo contest for your website, or more advocacy-focused, such as a letter-writing campaign to Members of Congress.
Whether or not these contests or other activities are advocacy-related, they are a great way to see who is willing to make the extra effort for your organization. These people can be reached out to in the future when needed for advocacy efforts, as they already have expressed an interest and a willingness to take action.

Including Social Media in Your Long-Term Goals

While it is true that maintaining a healthy presence on a variety of social networks can be time-consuming, it also can be extremely rewarding and effective. If your organization chooses to pursue social media either for advocacy or educational purposes, make sure you are strategic in your use of staff time and other resources. Avoid launching social media networks and campaigns just for the sake of doing so. Instead, use them as tools to enhance and integrate your educational and advocacy efforts elsewhere.

Social media is an excellent way to share and exchange information and to connect with people who otherwise might not be involved with your organization. Creating robust social networks can be an invaluable tool for mobilizing others and is an increasingly important way to educate and inform the public.

Remember These Five Steps for Success

- Determine your goals first and foremost, and let them guide you to the social media platform and metrics best suited to your organization.
- Build up an active and interactive presence on a variety of social media networks.
- Follow up on any comments or responses, and make sure to interact with potential advocates.
- Avoid oversaturating social media networks with advocacy-related posts.
- Use contests or other interactive web-based events to keep followers involved and to identify potential new advocates.

As with all advocacy efforts, defining or quantifying success may be difficult. Make sure to assess your presence on these networks periodically to evaluate whether your followers are active and interactive, as well as how to get them to be even more so.

See Social Media Exhibit 7: Example Social Media Network Survey (page 96)
Social Media Exhibit 1: Example Facebook Fan Page

This is a real-life example of a fan page on Facebook, which your organization could use to promote itself and advocacy opportunities.

Massachusetts Housing and Shelter Alliance

125 People Like This

Massachusetts Housing and Shelter Alliance

Massachusetts Housing and Shelter Alliance Article from the Huffington Post about Soldier On’s new housing facility. Be sure to check out the Ending Homelessness in Massachusetts blog tomorrow to learn more about the initiative from Soldier On’s Executive Vice President Steve Como.

Mass. Community Debut New Strategy For Helping Homeless Veterans

www.huffingtonpost.com

According to the National Coalition for Homeless Veterans, 107,000 American veterans find themselves homeless on any given night. The
Social Media Exhibit 2: Example Facebook User Profile

This is a real-life example of a user profile on Facebook, which your organization could use to promote itself and advocacy opportunities.

End Homelessness

Likes and Interests

Other

Change.org, National Coalition for the Homeless, National Alliance to End Homelessness, 100,000 Homes Campaign, Corporation for Supportive Housing, Stand Up For Kids - Worcester, National Housing Conference & the Center for Housing Policy, Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, The Road Home, National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty, The Urban Institute, Funders Together to End Homelessness, FHLB, Ending Homelessness, Project Place, HOM, Inc., and 2 more

Contact Information

Email: change.org
Address: 1510 K Street NW
Washington, DC 20005
Website: http://www.endhomelessness.org
http://www.abouthomelessness.blogspot.com
Social Media Exhibit 3: Example Twitter Feed

This is a real-life example of a Twitter feed, which your organization could use to promote itself and advocacy opportunities.

invisiblpeople

To make an issue matter, tell a story about it. To make a prsn matter, let him tell his own story http://bit.ly/aBYZmV #DT @invisiblpeople

36 minutes ago via JustCoz

rt @beddykanis I want to live in a city where everyone has a place to live. This plan can make that happen http://bit.ly/9Kwo4g I #100khomes

about 9 hours ago via HootSuite

Mark Horvath is bugging me http://bit.ly/aa2zmZ <--wins the award for best post of the day (maybe all year) thanks @jnswanson

about 9 hours ago via HootSuite

Click to urge your elected officials to support the plan to end homelessness in LA County! http://bit.ly/c0ByNd HT @100khomes PLEASE share

about 12 hours ago via HootSuite

To make an issue matter, tell a story about it. To make a person matter, let him tell his own story http://bit.ly/aBYZmV

about 12 hours ago via HootSuite

We Wrote A Book Y’All! — Jessica Gottlieb http://is.gd/gT62b l @JessicaGottlieb #wrecked me bad! #openmyeyes

about 12 hours ago via HootSuite

Mark Horvath Tells Stories of ‘Invisible People’ | @halogen tv

http://ow.ly/37elx glad they linked to @100khomes & @charitywater

Name InvisiblePeople.tv
Location Los Angeles
Web http://invisiblep...
Bio ::: the face and voice of homelessness :::
TANF ECF Needs You NOW!

2nd August, 2010
Written by Mindy Mitchell

Today, Mindy Mitchell writes about the TANF Emergency Contingency Fund, which is set to expire on September 30, 2010.

It’s been called the “best kept secret” of the federal stimulus plan, and unless the Senate acts soon, it will be over in just a couple months, which would be devastating for families who are homeless or are just barely avoiding homelessness. It’s the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Emergency Contingency Fund (ECF), which the Alliance has advocated using to support homeless families since the ECF began, and which I have been exploring for almost two months now as part of my summer internship.

Because I worked directly with homeless families in my former (pre-law school) life, it’s been more than a little frustrating for me this summer to learn how easily such a good program—for homeless families, for all families who are struggling economically, and for whole communities—can fall through the legislative cracks. The TANF ECF extension was originally part of H.R. 4213, which failed to pass the Senate until it was stripped of all its elements except unemployment insurance (UI). No one seems to know now what will happen to all the other vital programs that were originally included in H.R. 4213, but the Alliance is organizing an advocacy push in hopes of getting things moving again. The stated concern of some senators about the original legislation was the contribution to the federal deficit (which may not be warranted, btw), but now that UI has been passed on its own, the rest of these programs (including ECF and the National Housing Trust Fund) are all offset and won’t contribute to the deficit. So what’s the hold up, especially when this program is helping not just struggling families but struggling businesses?!

See, that’s the really cool thing about ECF, which CNN Money called “A stimulus program even a Republican can love”! TANF ECF can be used by states in any of three categories: basic assistance (to supplement the regular assistance programs TANF already administers), short-term, non-recurrent benefits (a wide range of preventive and supportive benefits, available even to families who aren’t already receiving TANF), and subsidized employment.

Many homeless providers are taking advantage of ECF’s short-term benefits to supplement and stretch their HPRP funds, including Utah’s The Road Home. And more and more states are taking advantage of the subsidized employment possibilities made available to them through ECF to create some 200,000 jobs, which can be used to serve families at higher income cut-offs than the regular TANF assistance program. These jobs are the real stars of the ECF show because they enable families who are homeless or are struggling economically to improve their incomes (which is an essential part of ending homelessness, of course) and they benefit local businesses and organizations that are also struggling in these tough economic times by allowing them to expand and employ more workers without expending capital that many of them don’t have right now.

It’s a win-win situation for entire communities like Perry County, TN, whose economy was devastated after its major employer, an auto parts factory, closed. And it can be a win-win situation for even more communities across the country if the Senate would only move this legislation along.

Extending TANF ECF would allow states to maintain the impressive subsidized employment programs they’ve begun and would allow states that don’t have subsidized employment programs to begin to implement them, increasing the well-being of families who are homeless and who are struggling across the country before that opportunity is “Going, Going,” and totally gone.

You can save TANF ECF. Call your senators and ask to speak to the person who works on housing issues (you can find your Congressional office phone numbers by calling the U.S. Capitol Switchboard at 202-224-3121). Tell them to make sure their boss works to protect TANF ECF before it’s too late.
Social Media Exhibit 5: Example Facebook Posts

Below are real-life examples of Facebook posts regarding advocacy opportunities and events.

UNITY of Greater New Orleans

Check out a recent letter to the editor in the TP regarding the homeless. What are your thoughts?

Hide the homeless? A letter to the editor
www.nola.com
Re: ‘Planning to fail on Esplanade,’ Other Opinions, Sept. 30. I am stunned by the insensitivity of the proposal to fill the molding former nursing home on Esplanade Avenue with homeless people. What about the feelings of those of us who are upset, even appalled, by the very sight of the less fort…

October 19 at 11:42am · View Feedback (3) · Share

Rhode Island Coalition for the Homeless

282 people without shelter this winter! Tell candidates you care about ending homelessness

Take Action: Tell candidates you care about ending homelessness
bit.ly
This election season we're working to ensure affordable housing and homelessness prevention remain key issues for Rhode Island candidates. Tell candidates that you care about affordable housing, tell candidates that you want to hear their plan to end homelessness in Rhode Island.

October 22 at 11:26am · Share

6 people like this.

Community Shelter Board

We just attended COHHIO’s advocacy training on the Ohio Housing Trust Fund. Did you know that more than 300,000 Ohio households have benefited from the Ohio Housing Trust Fund since its creation in 1991? It’s money well spent. Let’s keep a good thing going.

September 22 at 8:10am

Sara Colahan Loken likes this.
Social Media Exhibit 6: Example Social Media Alert

This is a real-life example of an alert, which your organization could send out to promote itself and advocacy opportunities.

Dear ________,

Did you know that the Partnership for Strong Communities is on Facebook and Twitter? If you are a Facebook user, I hope that you will write on our wall and post a picture and a story about your experiences with community building, affordable housing or homelessness. We’d love to hear from you.

If you’re a Twitter user, please follow the Partnership for updates and thoughts about housing and homelessness in Connecticut and around the nation. In addition, I’ve recently started to tweet. Follow me to find out what I’m reading, who I’m meeting with and what important things are going on in the world of housing.

Be sure to check out our various email publications here.

I look forward to seeing you all on our social networks!

Sincerely,

Diane Randall
Executive Director

Connect with the Partnership for Strong Communities:

Become a fan of the Partnership on Facebook:
Facebook.com/PartnershipforStrongCommunities

Follow the Partnership on Twitter: Twitter.com/PSCtweets
Follow Executive Director Diane Randall: Twitter.com/RandallPSC

Subscribe to our YouTube Channel:
YouTube.com/ctpartnershiphousing
Social Media Exhibit 7: Example Social Media Network Survey

This is a real-life example of a survey to send out to a social network to evaluate the effectiveness of an organization’s social media efforts and the makeup of its audience.

1. How old are you?
   - 12-25
   - 26-35
   - 36-45
   - 46-55
   - 56-66
   - 66+

2. Which of the following best describes your role in the homelessness field?
   - Policy advocate
   - Grassroots advocate/activist
   - Local Official
   - Researcher
   - Housing/Service Provider
   - Funder
   - Media
   - Interested citizen
   - Other
   Other (Please specify) ________________________________

3. What kind of content do you find most interesting/enjoyable?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content Type</th>
<th>Least interesting and/or useful</th>
<th>Somewhat interesting and/or useful</th>
<th>Most interesting and/or useful</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Policy updates</td>
<td>° Least interesting and/or useful</td>
<td>° Somewhat interesting and/or useful</td>
<td>° Most interesting and/or useful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunities to take action and advocacy updates</td>
<td>° Least interesting and/or useful</td>
<td>° Somewhat interesting and/or useful</td>
<td>° Most interesting and/or useful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media clips about homelessness and housing</td>
<td>° Least interesting and/or useful</td>
<td>° Somewhat interesting and/or useful</td>
<td>° Most interesting and/or useful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alliance reports, briefs, interactive tools and video</td>
<td>° Least interesting and/or useful</td>
<td>° Somewhat interesting and/or useful</td>
<td>° Most interesting and/or useful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News about Alliance events</td>
<td>° Least interesting and/or useful</td>
<td>° Somewhat interesting and/or useful</td>
<td>° Most interesting and/or useful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training webinars and virtual discussions</td>
<td>° Least interesting and/or useful</td>
<td>° Somewhat interesting and/or useful</td>
<td>° Most interesting and/or useful</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. Where do you interact with the Alliance? Check all that apply.
   - Read your newsletter, Alliance Online News
   - Follow you on Twitter (@naehomelessness)
   - Follow your status updates on Facebook
   - Read your status updates on Facebook
   - Use your website for work
   - Use your website for general information
   - Collaborate with Alliance staff on advocacy efforts
   - Collaborate with Alliance capacity-building team
   - Collaborate with Alliance research staff
   - Collaborate with Alliance Policy staff
   - Attend Alliance events

5. Which policy areas are you most interested in?
   - Permanent Supportive Housing
   - Subsidized Housing
   - Affordable Housing
   - Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing (HPRP)
   - National Housing Trust Fund
   - Human Services (TANF, HHS, SAMHSA)

6. The Alliance is now disseminating information on all kinds of networks!
   Which network do you like best/best suits your lifestyle?
   - I like checking your website from time to time
   - I like reading your posts on Twitter
   - I like reading your posts on Facebook
   - I like your Blog posts
   - I like your weekly newsletters
   - I like something else {please explain} ____________________________

7. What do you think about the frequency of updates on our social networks?
   - Too often: it’s overwhelming!
   - Just right
   - I want more!
   - I don’t follow you on social networks