

Social Media: an Outreach Tool

Citizens increasingly communicate and obtain information online, and the Governor has directed local government units to implement social media. With a little work, you can engage users who care about your message.

What are my options?

Different social media sites target different audiences, and you don't need to be on every social media platform – choose the ones most relevant to your message.



Facebook

Facebook is a social network that allows you to connect with other people of similar interests. On Facebook, you can interact with other users through posts, comments, messages, likes, and shares. You can also set up pages to market specific events. Facebook is the second-most popular social media site – 71% of U.S. adults who use the Internet are on Facebook. Facebook users are aging: 55% of users are between the ages of 25-54.



Twitter

Twitter is a micro-blogging platform that allows you to follow users you are interested in. Users post short (140 characters or less) updates, news headlines, statistics, or photos. You can also use hashtags so users can easily find your content. Users can favorite or retweet your tweets, which will increase how many people see your tweet. Twitter has a much younger demographic of users. 66% of Twitter users are between the ages of 15-24, with another 22% age 25-34. Only 12% of users are 35+.



YouTube

YouTube is a media sharing website that allows you to post and watch videos as well as upvote/downvote, comment on, and share videos. You can also embed (post) videos on other social media websites. YouTube is the most popular social media website with 1 billion registered users and over 4 billion video views each day. Because you do not have to register to watch videos, demographic information is not available, but it is believed that YouTube is well used by all age groups.



Flickr and Instagram

Flickr and Instagram are media sharing websites that allow you to post photos and view photos from other users. You can also use Flickr as a photo drop box – each user gets enough space for 500,000 photos. Flickr has a younger, male-dominated demographic; most users are men aged 18-34. Similarly, 90% of Instagram users are under the age of 35.

I'm on social media...now what?

Be identifiable. Choose a profile picture and username and use it consistently across social media platforms. Fill out profile information so users can learn more about you.

Know your target audience. Are you trying to provide information for informed citizens? Do you want to connect with conservation groups? Decide who you want to reach, and target your social media posts toward this audience. Similarly, you don't need to be on every social media platform – choose the platforms most relevant to your message.

Connect posts to your users. For every social media post, ask yourself, “Why should my audience care?” Some posts, like a photo of a beautiful fawn, don't need much explanation, but other posts, like information about an upcoming city council meeting, might need some more details. (“We will be discussing _____, which affects many landowners in _____ County. Stop by and make your voice heard!”)

Be positive. Research has found positivity boosts user engagement and shares.

Start a conversation. Social media has the power to connect individuals and groups and provide a space for a conversation. Engage your audience by inviting them to share opinions or experiences and informing them of upcoming events, and respond to all outreach to continue the conversation.

Use pictures to tell the story. Posts with pictures almost always get more likes, shares, and retweets than posts with just words. See the [USING PICTURES TO TELL A STORY](#) page for more tips on taking great photos.

Keep it short and sweet. Users might skim right over long paragraphs of information. To maximize user engagement, keep tweets to 100 characters and Facebook posts to just 80 characters.

Drive traffic to your website. You can include a link to your website on relevant posts, like posts about new programs, job openings, or recent projects.

Stumped? Try these ideas to engage your audience:

- Brag a little bit about a recent project or initiative from your organization.
- Post an interesting photo and invite users to “Caption this!”
- Inform your audience about upcoming events related to conservation, whether they are sponsored by your SWCD or by another local organization.
- Ask users to post photos from their own Earth Day cleanup, or share stories from the craziest winter storm they ever experienced.