Social Media Policy Guidelines

Social media can be a powerful tool to share information and to connect with survivors, communities, and supporters. As programs engage in this space, they need to create and maintain policies about the use of social media. Policies need to address issues ranging from privacy and safety of survivors and advocates, to the misuse of social media by abusers.

Your policies should be specific to your program's social media goals, use, and concerns. This guide will help you think through some of the key questions and issues to consider when developing a social media policy.

Introduction: Your Policy Should Support Your Mission and Goals

Before drafting any policy, it is important to review your organization's communication goals and mission and consider how the use of social media is in line with those goals. Important values to reflect in your policy include:

- **Promote survivor-centered services** and value survivor empowerment.

- **Support your overall communication goals**. For example, social media can be used to recruit volunteers, solicit donations, and increase participation in local events. It can also be used further your policy goals, raise awareness, or add your program's voice to conversations about these issues.

- **Respect survivor privacy**, adhere to social media platforms' community guidelines, and take into account your program's legal and ethical obligations, including survivor privacy, confidentiality, and notices about data collection.

Organization's Use of Social Media

What to post

What you post on social media is a public reflection of your organization. It is your voice. Some programs use social media to showcase their organization and activities. Some may only post activities that they support or are involved in. Others may see social media as a platform to raise awareness about broader anti-violence issues by posting articles, videos, or events that are connected to, but beyond the scope of the specific services they provide.

Social media monitoring and oversight

Some programs have a very strict policy on their social media content, which means that they need staff to monitor comments and posts regularly. Some programs don't have the staffing capacity to spend a significant amount time cultivating and engaging with their social media followers. Your policy should reflect your capacity for social media engagement. For example, if you don't have staff to monitor posts and comments, you may decide to turn off that feature or have a loose policy on what others say on your page to minimize the amount of time you need to spend monitoring it.

When to respond to opposing views

Many programs struggle to decide how to respond to opposing views, negative comments, harmful rants, or blatant inaccuracies posted on their pages. It is important to establish a clear policy both internally and externally, so you can address any instances with confidence and clarity. The policy should reflect your program's strategy and be grounded in your mission, vision, and social media goals. Different programs have different ways of handling opposing views.

Some programs treat social media as a space where everyone is encouraged to have a conversation about domestic violence or sexual assault. Their policy may

be to offer accurate information rather than deleting controversial content. Other programs see their social media presence as an extension of their organization's voice and messaging, and so their policy might be to not allow any comments or posts that disagree with their position. Investigate whether a given social media platform allows you to disable comments. Also, consider your program's capacity to moderate comments and how you will respond.

Unacceptable content

In addition to policies that address opposing views, your organization should have guidelines that address unacceptable content. For privacy reasons, posts or comments that include personally identifying information about another person should not be allowed. You may also want to exclude comments or posts that are blatantly inaccurate, harassing, or meant to cause harm. If you remove posts or comments, you should have clear and consistent policies around why and how. Inform users of the organization's rules for engagement. You may even consider informing the person whose comments or posts you removed why you did so and remind them of your content guidelines. When content violates your program's guidelines or the platform's community guidelines, you should also have a clear policy over whether you will report the user.

Connecting with others

Social media is all about connecting with other groups and people. It can be helpful to develop criteria your program can use to determine who to connect with. For example, if your program uses social media to raise awareness and therefore wants to accept all "follow" requests, it is important to constantly review the information you post to ensure that it's appropriate for a broad audience.

Posting about survivors

Organizations and staff should <u>never</u> post pictures, videos, or other information about specific survivors or any incidents that are not public knowledge as this may reveal the identity of survivors and violate confidentiality. Be strategic when posting information about private events, such as support groups or non-public events. This information may inadvertently inform abusers or stalkers where victims will be or invite opposing groups to crash private events.

Posting about staff

Programs should have policies on posting pictures or images of staff, conference attendees, or speakers on social media. Organizations should always have permission from individuals or, if that's not possible, offer clear and upfront notice about where a picture or video will be posted and allow people to choose not to be in the photo or video. Anyone can be a survivor with a concern about their privacy so policies should recognize and respect that.

Survivors posting on agency social media

Policies should address what to do when survivors post or comment on a program's social media. Some survivors may reach out for help or to tell their stories through social media. Some programs feel that allowing survivors to share their stories on their sites can be empowering, while others worry that survivors sharing personal information on a public page might pose a safety or privacy risk that the survivor was not aware of.

Wherever your organization falls on this continuum, having clear guidelines around acceptable and unacceptable content will help determine what comments/posts to keep or remove. If your content guidelines exclude personally identifying information, you might respond differently if someone posts about someone else's story vs. their own story. For example, you might remove

personal information that someone posts about someone else. Or, you might reach out to a survivor to share the reasons for your concerns including information about risks, and to help them make an informed decision about posting their story.

Survivors reaching out for support through social media

We strongly discourage using social media platforms as methods of providing direct services to survivors. Social media is not a private method of communication. Risks range from someone intercepting their messages, others having access to their social media accounts, or privacy settings changing resulting in "private" conversations becoming public.

While it is important to use communication platforms that survivors are comfortable with, providing resources or support via social media should be a last resort (i.e., no other communication methods are available) and other communication platforms should be considered first. If you do engage with a survivor via social media, be very thoughtful and cautious about privacy and safety. Provide upfront notice and information about privacy risks and offer other ways to communicate that give more privacy and security. Visit our [Digital Services Toolkit](#) for more information about text, chat, video, and other ways of communicating with survivors.

Advocates' Use of Social Media

In general, organizations should have few policies around advocates' personal use of social media. Except in certain specific instances, what advocates do on their own time on their own social media accounts is outside the boundaries of what programs can enforce.

Advocates engaging with survivors

Programs can have policies around board, staff, and volunteers' personal use of social media as it relates to engaging with survivors receiving services from your program. Advocates should not connect with or talk about survivors either by name or by speaking about incidents involving a survivor on their personal social media accounts. Advocates should also not look up survivor's social media accounts for the purpose of checking on them or verifying their activities. Doing so would violate the survivor's privacy and confidentiality.

Advocates' social media use as it relates to the organization

Some organizations may want policies in place around employees' interactions with the program or other professional colleagues through social networks. However, these policies should follow the organization's general personnel policies. Some organizations have a policy where if staff list the organization as their place of employment, they have to follow certain guidelines about what they can and cannot post; if they do not list the organization as their employer, they have more freedom over what they say.

Using social media during work hours

Policies on staff use of personal social media during work hours should follow the organization's general guidelines regarding staff taking personal calls or checking personal email and texts during work hours. However, some social media platforms require staff to log into their personal account in order to access the organization's page or profile; in this case restricting the use of personal social media at work would interfere with social media-related job duties.

When staff are using personal accounts to manage the organization's page or profile, be sure to have processes and policies in place to ensure that the organization can access the profile and posts if a staff person is out sick or leaves

the organization. It is also helpful to support staff in managing how to keep personal and work social media separate, and how to protect their own private information in profiles which might be linked to the organization. Learn more about managing social media from national nonprofit technology organizations like NTEN and TechSoup, who offer guides, articles, and online courses.

Survivors' Use of Social Media

Your program's role in survivors' use of social media should be limited to ensuring that survivors are aware of safety and privacy risks and strategies around using social media. Programs should not create policies that limit autonomy or access to a survivor's support network.

Allow social media in shelters or programs

For many survivors, being able to communicate with friends and family can be empowering and can help them feel connected, safe, and secure. For some, communicating with the abuser via social media may be safer than having a face-to-face meeting or phone conversation. We recommend that shelters or programs encourage survivors' safe use of social media by sharing information about increasing safety and privacy on these platforms (e.g., by turning off location services or changing privacy settings). We do not recommend that shelters or programs monitor survivors' social media, including connection or posts.

What survivors post

What survivors post should not concern the program, unless it jeopardizes the program or other survivors' confidentiality or safety, in which case, education about respecting the confidentiality and safety should be an ongoing process. Advocates should respect survivors' privacy by not monitoring their social media.

Education & Empowerment

Policies should promote education on privacy, safety, and potential legal risks when sharing too much information on social media sites. This can be part of a safety planning process or general information that is shared with survivors. Include the survivor's children or family members in these conversations as appropriate or provide links or materials for the survivor to share.

We update our materials frequently. Please visit TechSafety.org for the latest version of this and other materials.