

# Social Media

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## **Objective**

The objective of this activity is to promote the effective use of social media to disseminate information and encourage dialog within the social media universe. Social media has greater potential to increase citizen participation, but can inform the consultation process as well.

## **Summary**

Public agencies are increasingly using social media resources (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest, etc.) to disseminate information and facilitate dialogue with citizens. Social media offers many advantages, including low implementation costs and rapidly expanding public use. The demographic of social media users, particularly younger persons, may be underserved by traditional media sources as they move away from television and print news.

Social media also provides grantees with a flexible, real-time tool for two-way communication with the public. Social media strategies typically involve a two-step approach:

- Posting citizen participation related information on a new or existing public agency social media account.
- Partnering with other linked accounts (e.g., "friends", "re-tweets", etc.,) to popularize the published information and achieve the widest distribution possible.

The jurisdiction may elect to either set up a separate social media account for Consolidated Plan activities, use its own general account (e.g., Facebook page or Twitter account) or leverage the social media presence of public officials or other personalities to post Consolidated/Annual Action Plan updates, such as the dates of upcoming hearings and public comment periods, and information on how residents can provide their comments (web link, email address, etc.). The jurisdiction should then promote its social media presence through as many means as possible, asking residents to follow the agency on Facebook, Twitter, or other popular social media outlets to receive the latest news on the status of the Consolidated Planning process.

## **Application to the Consolidated Plan**

Social media is a quickly growing form of communication that grantees can employ as part of a strategy of innovative media outreach to both generate interest in the Consolidated Plan and involve all of their target populations and demographics in outreach and citizen participation opportunities by reaching residents who may not otherwise be aware of the Consolidated Plan process.

## **Target Audience/Usage**

The target audience for this activity is media savvy residents who are familiar with social media and use it on a regular basis.

## **Logistics and Materials Needed**

- Increasing the number of followers, friends, etc., of social media accounts can play a critical role in distributing information as widely as possible, and in recruiting new linked accounts.

- Social media is often conducted most successfully with brief, attention grabbing headlines or images. Creative and to the point social media postings will raise the "sharing" value of each post.
- The use of tagging, twitter hashtags, etc., is a valuable way to create dialog between linked accounts around a specific subject. For example, the Twitter hashtag #GothamHousingIssues could be used to promote a discussion around housing problems that could then be tracked beyond the grantee's own followers to every account using the hashtag #GothamHousingIssues.
- The Mayor of a large city's official Twitter account, which often has 10-20,000 or more followers, can serve as a supplemental outlet to announce citizen participation opportunities.
- Social media platforms offer a variety of analytic tools that allow for robust demographic and other data collection on who is receiving and providing input.
- Agencies can use social media to obtain resident input on the Consolidated Planning process either by allowing citizens to post comments directly to the agency's social media presence (e.g., Facebook page, Twitter account) or by providing an email address, and/or other contact method whereby residents can share more detailed feedback.

#### **Examples of the Use of Social Media**

- The city of Roswell, GA uses its official [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) accounts to inform the public of Consolidated Plan meetings.
- Kansas City, MO set up a [Facebook page](#) to keep residents informed of its latest updates, including the scheduling of public hearings regarding the development of their new 5-year Consolidated Plan.
- Official Facebook pages are maintained by the city of Houston, TX's [Department of Housing and Community Development](#), the city of Philadelphia, PA's [Office of Housing and Community Development](#) and the [Community Development Department](#) for the city of Cambridge, MA where each agency posts its latest news on their respective Consolidated Planning processes, publishes drafts of their Consolidated Plans and Annual Action Plans, and provides information on how residents can submit public comments on these drafts.