



NNEDV

Organizing in a Digital Age: Using Social Media to Collaborate, Educate, & Communicate

Questions to Consider

What is your goal?

Do you want someone to take action (sign a petition or attend an event)? Do you want to raise awareness about your issue or a specific concern (dispelling myths about domestic violence or educate about good/bad legislation)? Do you want to enhance outreach efforts (to the general public or a specific population)? Do you simply want to create an online presence?

Who is your audience?

The general public? Teens? College students? Women? Women with disabilities? Women of color? Survivors? Men? Identifying your target audience will help answer the next two questions. Who you are trying to reach will determine what methods and tools you use and how you sculpt your messages. If aiming for the general public, still look to see who is using certain mediums and what messages will engage them best.

What medium(s) will help accomplish your goal?

Email can be a great advocacy campaign tool, blogs can aid in creating a discourse, social networking sites can give you an online presence, MySpace and YouTube can assist in outreach, and a microsite can help to engage the public. There are many mediums to choose from depending on your end goal and your audience.

What is your message?

You want your message to be clear, succinct, and memorable. Too much information will overwhelm an audience and information that is too vague will be ignored, so pick strong points that are interesting, timely, and relevant. In this digital age, people are overwhelmed with information so make your message stand out.

What are the costs? What resources will it take?

Many online tools are free or inexpensive to use, although most require a significant amount of time and energy. It is important to consider capacity issues for both creating and maintaining online organizing efforts since online relationships need to be cultivated. For example, setting up a MySpace page will not automatically engage teens, get them to read your information, link to your website, and get involved. Outreach, a continued presence, and engaging messaging are needed,

What happens when your efforts work? What if they don't?

As you establish your activism online, those who reach out to you may be survivors. This raises many safety and privacy concerns since abusers may be monitoring the survivor's computer activities (including monitoring internet site visits, email communication, and posted messages). When stepping into the online world, be aware of safety precautions and be conscientious of the risks that exist for survivors when they reach out online. If you're aren't getting responses to your online organizing efforts, you may need to rethink your medium and your messaging. Online organizing requires substantial efforts to engage the audience in ways that will encourage them to take action, donate, volunteer, and learn.

In Conclusion

These are basic questions and things to consider when doing activism online. Several pieces on safety and privacy when using social media are also available. For additional materials or assistance, email safetynet@nnedv.org.