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COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT GUIDE



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....	4
Creating Community Engagement	5
Principles of Effective Storytelling..... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connect Your Mission to the Community 	5
Visual Elements for the Win..... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen Community Connections with Creative Visuals 	10
Media Outreach Rules of the Road <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share Your Mission & Build Credibility 	13
Social Media Communications for Maximum Impact..... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Influence Your Audience & Amplify Your Mission 	16
Top Tips for Effective Websites <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build Your Digital Front Door & Welcome Visitors 	19
Crisis Communication Primer..... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respond Strategically to Emergencies & Adverse Events 	21
Contact Information.....	24



INTRODUCTION

Congratulations! You've taken an important step in learning more about how to build awareness for your cause within your community.

Engaging with your community, whether digitally, in print, or in-person, requires you to develop strategies and plans for communicating with your audience based on specific situations.

The **Community Engagement Guide** is designed to help you learn how to create and disseminate information to your community to build awareness for your cause.

Whether you want to increase interest in your nonprofit's mission, solicit donations for fundraising events, tell a story about a volunteer's experience, or respond to an emergency or crisis, you'll get the basic guidelines on how and where to start.

- ✓ You'll learn the processes behind clear, concise, and consistent communications to help your nonprofit succeed.

PLUS – The **Guide** is packed with **tips, advice, and links to free and low-cost resources** to help you handle many different types of communications.

The **Community Engagement Guide** walks you through elements of building a plan for successful communications to increase your nonprofit's credibility and expertise. Inside, you'll find helpful guidance on best practices for:

- 1. Telling a great story about your nonprofit** that will engage and inspire your audience
- 2. Incorporating visual design into your communications** to enhance your messages
- 3. Sharing your messages across digital platforms**, like social media and your website, as well as with media outlets, and your community
- 4. Responding to a crisis using structured plans**, templates, and wording

If you're a communications beginner or an expert, you'll find steps, plans, and best practices to help your organization succeed.

The **Community Engagement Guide** is a companion to the **Building Awareness for Your Cause Video** and the **Outreach Communications Checklist** of the Nonprofit Toolkit.

PRINCIPLES OF EFFECTIVE STORYTELLING

Connect Your Mission to the Community

Storytelling is an important opportunity to convert moments from outreach efforts, volunteer days, and community events into content that helps people see why your organization's work matters.

- When you tell the story of your organization, you showcase its work and impact, bringing its mission to life for a diverse audience.

A great way to begin storytelling is to focus on the issues your organization solves and why your programs are vital to the community.

- **Start by conducting short, authentic interviews.**
- **Interviews can involve using a video camera or your smartphone** to take pictures, or record video and voice memos to capture emotion and accuracy.
- **You can use interviews to create a static post** (using only pictures and text) or a video to upload to your social media account(s).
- **During interviews, encourage people to speak freely** as you ask open-ended questions like, "How has this program impacted you?"
- **Try to catch participants when they are in the middle of related activities** because they are most engaged and energized at the time, which often results in compelling video footage.
- **Interview staff members, volunteers, and those you serve.**

Interview questions can be similar, regardless of the audience you interview.

- **You should focus primarily on why individuals choose to serve** and what it means to them, how it has changed them, and helped them to become better people.
- **Their stories become your organization's voice**, revealing your mission in action and the heart behind your work.
- **Writing authentic, personal narratives** is a powerful way to show your organization's value.

For example, if your organization has a food pantry, you could interview Mary, a pantry volunteer, and create a personal narrative about how Mary received food at the pantry, and then decided to give back by volunteering at the pantry to help others.

You could then tell Mary's story in ways that align with specific communication channels your audience uses.

One way involves creating a brief synopsis of Mary's story to use on your website, specifically the webpage dedicated to your food pantry. Review the example below:

When Mary first walked into the food pantry, she was nervous and quiet. Laid off from her job three months ago, Mary had been searching for work unsuccessfully ever since. Mary told our pantry volunteers that she was out of work, couldn't make ends meet, and only came to the pantry as a last resort. One of our volunteers

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assured Mary that having food would be one less thing she would have to worry about. Today, Mary has a full-time job and she volunteers at the pantry each weekend, Mary greets each visitor with a warm smile and offers a helping hand.

“This place gave me hope when I had none,” she said. “Now I get to pass that on to others.”



Why this narrative works: It’s short, heartfelt, and provides tangible evidence of how the food pantry not only served Mary’s immediate needs, but also transformed her outlook on life, compelling her to serve others.



TIP:

You can make Mary’s narrative even more poignant by including an image, or video excerpt, of Mary working in the food pantry.

Another way involves creating a full article covering Mary’s story, which you post to the article section of your website.

Before reviewing the example of the full article, it’s important to understand the elements for conducting a successful interview, including:

- *How to prepare before the interview*
- *What to do during the interview*
- *How to create a compelling story after the interview*



BEFORE THE INTERVIEW:

To prepare for the interview, follow these steps:

- **Ask Mary for permission** to interview her about her experience.
- **Create a list of interview questions** beforehand, and become familiar with them prior to the interview.

- Be prepared to pivot interview questions, based on Mary’s answers.
- Be flexible to ask additional questions. You may find that you want to further explore information she shares, and those questions weren’t part of your initial list.

- **Provide Mary with options for the interview structure**, including participating in-person, over the phone, or during a virtual conversation.

- You could also send Mary your interview questions by email, and ask her to send you her answers in an email reply.



TIP:

Whatever interview method you choose, be sure it works best for the person you’re interviewing, using a format where they’ll feel comfortable answering your questions.

- Mary agrees to the interview and decides that she’d like to meet with you at the food pantry on Saturday afternoon before she starts her volunteer shift.



DURING THE INTERVIEW:

- **You then conduct the in-person interview with Mary, taking notes** as she answers your questions. You even ask her some follow-up questions based on the information she shares.
- During the interview, the volunteers who first met Mary were also working at the food pantry. With Mary’s permission, you asked if they would participate in the interview, and they agreed.

- You don't record the interview, but you do ask Mary for permission to take her picture while she works with others in the pantry, and she agrees.



AFTER THE INTERVIEW:

- **Summarize the interview in a format you can share with your audience** – written, video, image – shared via email, website, social media, and other outlets.
 - You decide to tell Mary's story in an article you post to your website, using your notes from Mary's interview to guide your writing.
- **You'll need to tell Mary's story in a way that others can understand and also relate to.** Ask yourself the following questions to help create the outline for your story:
 - *What is the main goal for telling Mary's story?*
 - *What are the most important points you want your audience to know about Mary, your food pantry, and volunteering?*
- *How much information does the audience need to know about the volunteers at the food pantry?*
- *How do you want your audience to feel when they read your article?*
- *Why should Mary's story be important to them? What elements of the story will make them care?*
- *What do you want your audience to do with the information you share with them? (This is your call-to-action.)*
- After creating your story outline, start writing. Integrate the answers to the questions into your story. You decide that the main goal of the story is to help readers understand how important the food pantry is to the community.

Review the full article below, written after Mary's interview, showing her journey from food pantry recipient to dedicated volunteer. Mary's picture was taken as she carried a bag of food to a pantry visitor.

Mary's Story: Finding Hope in Desperate Times

When Mary first walked into our food pantry one cold December afternoon, she was nervous and quiet. She didn't make eye contact with anyone at first and looked embarrassed about having to ask for food.

Laid off from her job three months ago, Mary had been searching for work unsuccessfully ever since. Because she hadn't found a job, she was getting desperate. Mary had no close relatives or friends who could help.

On the verge of tears, Mary told our pantry volunteers that she was out of work, couldn't make ends meet, and only came to the pantry as a last resort. She said she was ashamed to ask for help and felt foolish being there.

Two pantry volunteers, Jake and Nancy, were kind to Mary, assuring her that they wanted to help her and that her situation wasn't anything to be ashamed of. They offered her a cup of hot tea, a warm muffin, and a comfortable chair to relax in. Mary sat down reluctantly, still wearing her winter coat and hat.

Grabbing a chair, Nancy sat down beside Mary, asking her where she lived and what kind of work she did, hoping to establish rapport and make Mary feel at ease. Mary



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answered Nancy's questions but still seemed reluctant to share information about herself. Nancy said,

"You know, plenty of people have been in similar situations when they came to the pantry to get food. All of us volunteers are happy to help anyone who visits the pantry. In fact, it's our job to do so."

Grinning, Nancy then rattled off some big numbers of how many people the pantry has helped over the years. She then said,

"What I'm trying to say is that anyone, at any time, could be in the same boat as you are right now, through no fault of your own. You're here, and that's a great start!"

Mary looked up from her cup of tea. Her eyes met Nancy's, but she didn't speak. Nancy saw tears start to form in Mary's eyes. Hoping to break the solemn atmosphere, Nancy stood up, gently placed her hand on Mary's shoulder, and said,

"Well, I can tell you this, having enough food to eat will be one less problem that you'll need to worry about, that's for sure. Mary, let's get you some good, good food to take home. Come walk with me over here."

Directing Mary to a large table, Nancy stood behind the table and summoned Jake over to help. They pulled food from wall shelves and gave Mary boxes filled with food staples.

The volunteers chatted with Mary during the entire process, and encouraged her to return when she needed more food. Mary visited the pantry several times since her first visit, feeling less anxious and nervous with each encounter. She looked forward to talking with Nancy, Jake, and the other volunteers, and gradually began to develop friendships with them.

Mary has since found a full-time job and hasn't needed food from the pantry for months. Instead, she gives food to others as a pantry volunteer, working every weekend alongside the same volunteers who eagerly helped her when she needed it most.

Mary greets each visitor with a warm smile and offers a helping hand, taking her cues from Nancy on how to make others feel comfortable and unashamed.

Reflecting on her experiences at the food pantry, Mary said,

"This place gave me hope when I had none. Now I get to pass that on to others."

If you or someone you know needs our help, please email, call, or visit the food pantry. You can find our contact information and hours of operation at the bottom of this webpage.

After reading Mary's story, do you think that the goal for telling her story was met, specifically, to help people understand the food pantry's importance to the community?



REMEMBER:

You can use quotes, sections, and snippets of the full article across communication channels, as you saw in the earlier example of the abbreviated version of Mary's story, which appeared on the organization's food pantry webpage, while the longer version of the story appeared in the article section of the organization's website.

- ✓ Maybe you want to create a social media post about Mary, so you condense the article even more, distilling it into a short summary of a few sentences, and including a link to the full article on your website.
- ✓ There are many other ways to repurpose Mary's story into different communications and channels, depending on the goals you want to achieve.

IMPORTANT TIPS:

Always obtain permission from the person you're interviewing.

Permission includes not only publishing their responses online and in print, but also using their first and/or last name, image, and any interview recordings, quotes, or excerpts across digital and print communication channels.

Examples of communication channels include your:

- Website
- Online ads
- Social media pages, posts, and ads
- Emails
- Community announcements
- Printed flyers, posters, signs, and postcards
- Local news outlets
- Community's advertising or promotional channels

Each permission should be documented in writing, such as the interviewee sending you permission by email, or the interviewee signing a permission form that you create and use for everyone you interview.

Keep a written record of permissions granted from everyone you interview to ensure you only publish information about them if they've agreed to it.

Discover More

You can explore numerous online resources that help nonprofits develop effective storytelling strategies and spark ideas for how to begin.

Check out links to some of these resources below:

- **Nonprofit Hub** – [Free Downloadable Nonprofit Guides](#) for Storytelling, Digital Advertising, and many more
- **Neon One** – [Free Downloadable Nonprofit Guides](#) for Storytelling, Social Media, and more
- **Kannect** – [Free Articles](#) on Creating Community Engagement, Impact, and many others

CREATING COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT VISUAL ELEMENTS FOR THE WIN

Strengthen Community Connections with Creative Visuals



Visual storytelling conveys emotion and helps your audience to feel a specific way about your mission.

Rather than just reading words, your audience has a stronger impression of your organization when you incorporate visuals with words, or only use visuals.

Using your creativity when incorporating visual elements into your messages helps to ensure that your messages will resonate with your audience.

Because you'll use visual elements with your messages, you'll be able to better connect with the audience on a more personal level, which is more difficult by simply using words alone.



REMEMBER:

Not every message has to convey a serious tone. You can still incorporate lighthearted stories, inspiring moments, and relatable vignettes into your message to build connection with your audience and enhance your mission.

So, what are creative visual elements?

Beyond traditional photos, creative visual elements can take many forms to bring your story to life, communicating your message with emotion and purpose.

- ✓ It's important to incorporate the same visual elements across your organization's messaging.
- ✓ In other words, your organization's name, logo, letterhead, website, marketing materials, and any other public-facing content should include a consistent color scheme, font style, and so on.

- ✓ That way, you present a consistent, unified look and feel, when communicating with your audience because you want them to perceive your organization as consistent, organized, and uniform.

Examples of visual elements include:



- **Graphics** – Computer-produced visual images
- **Illustrations** – Visual representations of a story, used to further explain concepts or meanings, including a sketch, drawing, or painting
- **Typography** – Style of printed font for words, letters, numbers, and symbols
- **Shapes** – Circles, squares, triangles, rectangles
- **Colors** – Hue (color name), Value (light or dark color), Saturation (color intensity)
- **Page Borders** – Lines and/or designs to frame content on the page
- **Icons** – Simple designs for conveying a concept or idea, such as company logo or software name
- **Form** – 3-D Shape – Cone, sphere, cube, irregular shape
- **Value** – Color lightness or darkness
- **Space** – Area around and between visual or design elements
- **Texture** – Visual illusion to add interest and dimension of a surface, including smooth, rough, soft, hard, glossy, or matte



- **Lines** – Horizontal, vertical, straight, curved, diagonal
- **Charts** – Data shown in graphic form, such as a table, graph, diagram, or map
- **Videos** – Recording of moving images
- **Infographics** – Visual interpretation of information, ideas, or data using charts, columns, images, graphics, and colors, with minimal text

Where should you add creative visual elements?

You can add visual elements to any type of audience communication, including the following examples:

- Brand logo
- Sign for your physical location
- Posters
- Postcards
- Brochures
- Catalogs
- Flyers
- Signs
- Banners
- Calendars
- Coupons
- Event sponsorship materials
- Online ads
- Social media ads
- Social media posts
- Blogs/articles
- Case studies/testimonials
- Emails
- Billboards and outdoor advertising
- Print ads
- TV commercials
- And many more

What if you're not a professional designer?

The good news is that you don't need expensive software to make professional-looking content.

- ✓ Free and low-cost tools like [Canva](#) provide nonprofits with access to templates, brand kits, and team collaboration features, making it easy to create flyers, social posts, infographics, and videos, without prior experience.
- **Canva**, or similar software, helps you to not only create interesting visual elements, but also to incorporate them into your brand messaging.

- Design software helps you keep your brand colors, logo, and the like, simple, polished, and consistent.



TIP:

You can find many online Canva and designing tutorials, including videos, to help you learn design basics quickly and confidently.

The [Canva website](#) and [YouTube](#) are great places to start to find Canva tutorials for beginners.

REVIEW THESE 3 BASIC STEPS BEFORE YOU CREATE ANY VISUALS:

1. **Design and keep versions of your logo** on hand (PNG and JPG are the most widely used graphic formats)
2. **Choose one or two brand colors and easy-to-read fonts**, and use them consistently across all materials.
3. **Whenever possible, use images of your community** and its residents (*with their permission*) instead of canned stock photos.



REMEMBER:

Authenticity conveyed in an image resonates far more deeply with your audience than a perfectly staged and posed stock photo.

Here are some ideas for creating visuals to get your creative juices flowing:

For easy creative projects:

1. **Try pairing a photo with a short quote** and statistic to create an “impact card,” a high-quality postcard to send to your target audience.
2. **Film a quick 30-second video** on a phone or tablet of someone sharing how your organization has helped them.

3. Showcase your organization's influence through innovative ways, sharing:

- **Before-and-after photos** when you want to show a comparison of how your mission solved a problem or improved a situation
- **Volunteer spotlight stories**, including specific volunteers or groups of volunteers, and how they help your organization's cause
- **Social media carousel ads**, such as [Facebook carousels](#), that highlight important events and milestones pertaining to your mission and organization

Don't forget to follow these practical guidelines for creating, saving, and retrieving visual elements:

- ✓ **When creating graphics, use high contrast and large text.**
 - Keep one clear idea as the focus of each graphic.
- ✓ **Create a folder for saving and retrieving [brand assets](#), templates, and photos to save time and keep your brand visuals and any other visual elements in the same location.**
 - Alternatively, [Canva's brand kit feature](#) lets you store your organization's logos, fonts, and color palette in one place.
 - Keeping your brand kit in Canva will ensure that your materials stay consistent and easy to access whenever you create new content.
- ✓ **Before featuring community members and other individuals in your photos, obtain their consent to do so.**
 - Portray everyone you take pictures of with dignity. If a photo isn't flattering to the person in it, use a different photo instead.
 - Ensure you assign credit to outside photographers (or stock images), when appropriate.

Finally, let your creative visuals work even harder for you by changing them into other formats.

For example: If you record a video interview to convey the story of a volunteer, you can then use the video, video transcript, or screenshots from the video, across multiple communication channels.

Let's look at some of the ways that you can repurpose the same video into other types of content to reach your audience.

Examples include transforming the video into a(n):

- ✓ **Written article or blog** about the volunteer to share on your website
- ✓ **Infographic** that tells the volunteer's story using mainly visual elements instead of heavy text
- ✓ **Condensed video snippet** of the interview to share on Meta (Facebook) or other social media platforms
- ✓ **One-page flyer** with the volunteer's photo and a short outline conveying the story
- ✓ **And many more** – Use your imagination to find creative ways to repurpose content for different channels but still convey the same message.



TIP:

Creativity doesn't require a big budget or a large team.

- ✓ With intention, imagination, and a few simple tools, any nonprofit can create eye-catching materials.
- ✓ Whether you create a video filmed on a phone, a Canva-designed flyer, an infographic for social media, or a printed brochure for an event, if your visuals reflect your mission, your audience will take notice and remember your organization.

MEDIA OUTREACH RULES OF THE ROAD

Share Your Mission & Build Credibility

Sharing your stories and events with the media through a press release advances your mission beyond your organization's immediate circle.

Follow the guidelines below for creating and distributing a press release:

DETERMINE GOALS & AUDIENCE:

- ✓ The main goals of a press release are to *amplify your visibility and build organizational credibility*.
- ✓ Your goal in writing a press release should be to *help people understand why your story or event matters* to them and to their community.
- ✓ *DON'T try to impress your audience by using big words* that make your message harder to understand.

*Remember the old adage about clear writing:
"Know the big words but use the small."*

- ✓ *Make your press release relevant to your audience by focusing on three key areas: people, partnerships, and purpose.*

CHECK LENGTH, TONE, & VISUALS:

- ✓ **A good release is typically 300–500 words**, focused mainly on the most important and newsworthy points.
- ✓ **Write in a conversational tone**, using plain language, short paragraphs, and bulleted or numbered points to help break up text.
- ✓ **Include photos and graphics** with your press release, so your message resonates more with your audience.

- ✓ **Include an image, tag any partners or sponsors**, and use a short, action-oriented caption (e.g., "See how your support made this possible!").

PROOFREAD & DOUBLE CHECK:

- ✓ **Once you finalize your press release, carefully proofread it**, and run a spell check, before distributing it. Ask a colleague to proofread it, as well, to benefit from an objective review.

POST & DISTRIBUTE:

- ✓ **Post the press release to your website**, and include a short description on your social media posts, with a link to the press release on your website.
- ✓ **Determine the channels where you need to distribute the press release** and coordinate distribution with those platforms and organizations.
- ✓ **Choose applicable outlets for your press release**. When deciding which media outlets to contact, remember that local news outlets, community bulletins, and even church newsletters often welcome stories about positive community impact.



TIP:

If your organization is large, and you want to distribute press releases nationally, you can use paid platforms such as [PR Newswire](#), [EINPresswire](#), and [ACCESS newswire](#).



BASIC STEPS FOR COMMUNICATING EFFECTIVELY

Keep in mind that you don't have to be a professional writer to communicate effectively through a press release, but you should ensure that your message comes across in the way you intend it to.

- ✓ **Incorporate the right tools, teamwork, and message** to craft a press release that gets attention.
- ✓ **Start by writing the way that you talk** - speaking clearly, concisely, and using a conversational tone.
- ✓ **Ask someone in your organization who's a good writer to help you.** They can proofread your work, and give you tips on how to improve.
 - *Or ask someone you know who's a good writer/editor to review your work and tighten your writing.*
 - *Hire a writer/editor to help you on a per project basis if there are no other options.*
- ✓ **You can also find free online guides and video tutorials** that walk you through every step of writing a nonprofit press release, from formatting tips to headline examples.
 - **Check out some free online resources listed next:**
 - [Press Release Examples for Nonprofits and Charity Events / PR Newswire](#)
 - [How to Write a Perfect Nonprofit Press Release / Donorbox](#)
 - [How to Write a Nonprofit Press Release in 7 Steps \(With Examples\) / Instrumentl](#)

KEY CONSIDERATIONS WHEN USING AI TOOLS

Online tools and platforms, including AI writing assistants, like ChatGPT, Google Gemini, or Microsoft Copilot, can help you organize your thoughts, draft ideas, and refine your writing tone and structure.

- ✓ *But you shouldn't use them to do the writing for you.*

Remember that any writing that these AI tools create can be from anywhere on the internet, and from any source, without copyright approval.

- ✓ When AI platforms scoured the internet for their content, they didn't request permission to use or redistribute copyrighted material.
- ✓ There have been countless instances of plagiarism across these platforms, and related legal action against the AI platforms by the parties whose content was plagiarized, with many more lawsuits on the way.

That means, when you ask ChatGPT or another AI tool to write something for you, odds are high that it will pull copyrighted material into the content it creates for you.

- ✓ The same holds true for images that you ask an AI platform to create.
 - Although images may seem to be new, most of the time, they are eerily similar to copyrighted images.
- ✓ Steer clear of copyright infringement by using your own images or free stock images available online through sites like [Dreamstime](#).

 **TIP:**

While it's not necessarily problematic to ask AI platforms for help with generating ideas for new content, or creating formats, outlines, and templates, such as a template for a press release, **it's not advisable to trust solely in an AI platform to write content for you.**

- ✓ US Copyright Laws prohibit anyone from reusing copyrighted materials without first obtaining the original author's permission.

To protect yourself and your organization from accusations of plagiarism (and related legal implications), always read, revise, and edit any writing, or editing, that AI platforms produce.

- ✓ **Best rule of thumb to follow:** Change any AI written or edited content into your own words to avoid replicating copyrighted content that another author, website, or organization created and legally owns.

7 STEPS TO CREATE AN EFFECTIVE PRESS RELEASE

For a print, online or email publication, follow these steps:

1. Start with "FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE."
2. Add a clear headline to summarize your story.
3. Include city, state, and date (e.g., CHICAGO, Ill. – Oct. 15, 2025).
4. Lead with the "5 Ws" (who, what, when, where, and why) in one short paragraph.
5. Follow with brief, supportive details and a quote from your organization's leader to humanize the story.
6. Close with your boilerplate ("About Us") and provide your contact information.
7. End with ### or -END-, a traditional mark signaling the end of the release.

 **TIP:**

Search online for "free press release templates for nonprofits" or "how to write a press release step-by-step" — you'll find many simple, credible resources that make the process easy, even for beginners.

- ✓ Here are some free resources to get started:

- [Press Release Examples for Nonprofits and Charity Events | PR Newswire](#)
- [How to Write a Perfect Nonprofit Press Release | Donorbox](#)
- [How to Write a Nonprofit Press Release in 7 Steps \(With Examples\) | Instrumentl](#)

SOCIAL MEDIA COMMUNICATIONS FOR MAXIMUM IMPACT

Influence Your Audience & Amplify Your Mission



Social media is one of the most effective tools nonprofits have to build awareness, grow support, and strengthen relationships.

When you use social media strategically, you can amplify your mission and influence by connecting your stories with the people who will care about them the most.

FOLLOW THESE 5 STEPS FOR INCREASING YOUR IMPACT ON SOCIAL MEDIA:

1. Only choose social media platforms that your target audience uses.

- ✓ Generally, Facebook (Meta) works well for telling community stories and providing event and fundraising updates. Facebook is the most widely used social media platform in the U.S.
- ✓ LinkedIn is ideal for reaching potential partner organizations and professionals across industries.

Regardless of the social media platform you choose, remember that your main goal should be to connect with your audience, whether they're using Facebook, LinkedIn, or other social media channels like YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, and X.

- ✓ Each platform has its own style, interactions, and connections. Study the types of posts on the platforms to become familiar with the best approach to suit your audience.
- ✓ Whichever platform you choose, ensure that you tailor your communications to fit each platform's structure and style.

- ✓ Communications can include written or video posts, paid ads, links to information on your website, and more.

✓ EXAMPLE:

Facebook is considered to be a more casual platform for communication, whereas LinkedIn is considered to be a more professional platform. Instagram's structure is more about sharing visual photos, graphics, images, and aesthetics as priority over having conversations.

2. Create an official social media account for your organization on each platform you choose (if you haven't already done so).

- ✓ *When you create social media accounts, you have the opportunity to highlight your organization's identity online, which helps your brand to establish credibility, trust, and maintain a professional, polished presence.*
 - *For these reasons, it's important to set up social media accounts with consistent branding, including:*
 - Your brand logo as your profile picture
 - Uploading a branded image for your cover photo (which should appear in the large banner at the top of your social media account's Home page).

- The branded image that reflects your mission, values, and/or the work that you do.
- Complete the details of each of your social media accounts, such as your organization's:
 - Website address
 - Contact information
 - Purpose, written as a brief description



TIP:

Including consistent visuals, logos, and organizational information across all social media platforms that you use helps to reinforce your credibility, create awareness of your brand, and helps audiences to remember who you are and what you stand for.

3. Create social media posts that inform, educate, inspire, and encourage your audience to take action.

✓ Decide what goal you want to accomplish before you post:

- *Do you want to create awareness, would you like your audience to engage with your post by liking or sharing it, or should they contact you to find out how to volunteer?*
- Determine the *why* behind your post to then decide *what information* you should post.

Examples: Share behind-the-scenes photos and short videos, staff milestones or highlights, and quotes from volunteers or those you serve.



TIP:

Including a mix of topics in your posts, such as organizational achievements, event announcements, fundraising efforts, donor appreciation, and real-life moments, will keep your social media feed authentic and engaging for your audience.

- The previous examples illustrate how you can provide your audience with definitive information about your mission, and still make your message interesting and relevant.
- ✓ **Ensure that you establish reasons that your audience should care about the information you post.**
 - Your message should always tie back to the initial goal that you wanted to achieve from posting in the first place.
- ✓ **Include a call-to-action within each post:**
 - *Do you want your audience to sign up for your newsletter, visit your website, read an article you wrote, participate in an event, or something else?*
 - Ensure that you decide what the call-to-action should be before posting, and that the reason for the call-to-action ties back to your organizational communications strategy.

4. Post consistently across social media platforms to build trust with your audience.

- ✓ **Establishing a simple rhythm**, such as posting up to three times a week, helps your audience to recognize and remember your organization's purpose, mission, and values.

- **You can encourage audience engagement** by asking them to share answers to your questions, participate in polls or surveys, follow you, and comment about your posts, tag your organization, or share your posts with others.

- **You can also broaden your reach** by asking board members, staff, and volunteers to engage with your posts and content, then share them with their followers.

5. Finally, track how your posts perform across each social media platform, determining the types of information and messaging that resonated with your audience.

- ✓ **Document which posts get the most engagement**, clicks, or shares, and which ones get the least.
- Then use those insights to refine your approach, if necessary, to do better the next time.
- ✓ **Set small goals at first for your social media outreach**, such as increasing engagement, boosting website visits, attracting new donors, and more.
- **Consistently adjust** your messaging and approach, based on your past performance.

REMEMBER:

Social media isn't just about promotion — it's about establishing connections with your community, engaging with your audience, and conducting relevant and meaningful online conversations.

- ✓ Use social media strategically to share your heart, celebrate your organization and community, and invite others to be part of your story.

TIP:

Many free online tutorials and nonprofit resources offer step-by-step guidance on setting up and managing your social pages with confidence.

If your organization doesn't have the staff or resources to manage social media accounts, then consider asking for volunteers to help, hire a college or high school student adept in online social media communications, or utilize freelance contractor websites to hire help like *Fiverr*, *Upwork*, and *PeoplePerHour*.

TOP TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE WEBSITES

Build Your Digital Front Door & Welcome Visitors



Your website is your digital front door, and often the first place people go to learn about your mission, programs, and impact.

A well-designed site builds trust, encourages giving, and makes it easy for visitors to connect with your work.

Here are 5 steps to guide you for creating and managing your website, whether you perform the work, hire someone else, or find a website hosting platform to help you achieve your goals.

- 1. Create a dependable foundation to ensure a strong website presence.**

Choose a hosting provider that offers reliable uptime, meaning your website stays online and accessible around the clock.

✓ **Most reputable hosts guarantee at least 99.9% uptime**, ensuring donors, volunteers, and partners can visit your site whenever they need to.

✓ **Also make sure they offer secure (SSL) connections** to protect visitor information and scalable plans that can grow with your organization's needs.

- 2. Determine if your nonprofit has a web developer to create and manage your website.**

If your nonprofit doesn't have a web developer on staff, there are many user-friendly website builders that make it possible for anyone with basic computer skills to maintain a professional site.

✓ **Look for "drag-and-drop" or WYSIWYG** (what you see is what you get) editors.

✓ **These platforms allow you to build and update pages visually**, without needing to know website development code.

✓ **Alternatively, you may be able to attract a volunteer developer** willing to help your organization without charging for services.

- 3. Research available website hosting platforms, where you can do the work, yourself, using templates for specific types of webpages.**

✓ **Check with popular companies** like [Wix](#), [Squarespace](#), and [Hostinger](#), which are easy-to-learn platforms that offer templates, content management tools, and integrated donation forms.

✓ **Find the platform that works best** for your organization and budget.

- 4. Start building your website by sharing basic information about your organization.**

Your site should clearly answer who you are, what you do, and how someone can get involved and give to your organization.

✓ **Include easy-to-find links** for donations, volunteering, and upcoming events, and make sure your contact information is visible on every page.

5. Maintain your website consistently.

- ✓ **Assign someone to update your content regularly** with recent news, events, and impact stories.
- **Consistently include fresh photos, videos, and testimonials** that make your mission real to visitors.
- **Make sure to link your website** to your social media accounts, newsletters, and online giving tools to create a connected digital presence.
- **These links help drive traffic** between platforms and keep your audience engaged across multiple touchpoints.



TIP:

Some host sites provide free or discounted nonprofit plans, allowing you to access features like custom domain names, with your organization's name, followed by .org, email accounts, and security hosting, at little or no cost.

- ✓ Look for platforms that specifically highlight “nonprofit programs” or “charitable pricing” to save costs while maintaining a professional website appearance.



CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS PRIMER

Respond Strategically to Emergencies & Adverse Events



How you communicate with the public when a crisis happens at your organization will determine whether you've built trust with your community or destroyed it.

- ✓ **Examples of crises include:** Natural disasters, death of an employee or board member, leadership resignations, cyber-attacks, website disruptions, phone system breakdowns, employee turmoil or disruption, community protests, online complaints, and many others.
- ✓ **Effectively dealing with a crisis requires you to strategically communicate information** to your audience and community. It's important that you acknowledge the crisis, and share how your organization is handling it.

Follow the steps below to help your nonprofit respond clearly, quickly, and compassionately during a crisis, even if you don't have a communications or public relations employee or team.

1. Before a crisis occurs, develop a plan for responding:

- **Pick a small team (3–5 people):** Include an executive lead, operations lead, and board chair (or designee), along with one communicator (who can be you).
- **Name a spokesperson** who will be the one voice to represent the organization externally, with all inquiries directed to the spokesperson.

- **Create a contact list of those who should be notified in the event of a crisis:** This list should include the phone numbers and/or email addresses of internal staff, board members, key partners, major donors, and facility contacts, as appropriate.
- **Determine your communications channels,** including your website, emails, and social platforms, which will become your official notification channels for sharing important information within your community.
- **Make a one-page plan** to determine who to notify in the event of a crisis or emergency, and when to notify them, who drafts the initial communication on behalf of the organization, who approves it, and who hits “send.” Make sure that everyone who plays a part in executing the plan understands the plan and their roles in it.

2. Within the first hour of a crisis, gather pertinent information before responding to the community:

- **Gather facts:** What happened, who's affected, what's being done now – write down all of the details.
- **Protect people first:** Safety and privacy outrank speed. Don't publish names or details that could harm anyone.

- **Acknowledge quickly (even if details are limited):**
 - ✓ Consider implementing the following template for your acknowledgement message:

We're aware of [brief description of crisis]. Our team is addressing it, and we'll share updates as we have them. For verified information, please check [website/page] or contact [spokesperson, phone/email].

- **Post your acknowledgement message** on your website (or a pinned social post) and link to it as needed.
- **Align internally:** Tell staff/board what you've said publicly and where updates will appear. Ask them not to speculate with others or provide personal statements in any public or online forum.

3. On the same day of the crisis, respond with clarity and care:

- **Share what you know and what you're doing:** What happened (high level), immediate steps taken, how to get help, when you'll update next.
- **Lead with empathy:** Acknowledge impact, avoid blame.
- **Keep messages short and consistent:** Website first, then email/social linking back to your website page.
- **Document your effort:** Time of updates, decisions, and approvals. (Using a simple Google Doc is fine for recording your efforts.)

4. During the crisis, consistently communicate with your team and the community until the crisis is resolved:

- **Update on a predictable rhythm:** Even providing your community with a "no new updates" message builds trust.

- **Correct misinformation kindly:** Link back to your official update page on your website.
- **Determine how you and your team will respond to the crisis, and the type of information that specific audiences need to know.**

• Examples include:

- ✓ **Staff/volunteers:** What to do today, who will answer inquiries, what to say.
- ✓ **Clients/participants:** Which services are affected, and what are the alternate options?
- ✓ **Donors/partners:** What is the impact to them, what are the costs, and how can they help?

5. After a crisis, close the communications loop:

- **Share a final recap with your internal team and the broader community:** What happened, what you learned, what you've changed.
 - ✓ **Thank your community:** Depending on the situation, it may be appropriate to convey appreciation to your community for their patience, dedication, and/or assistance in helping to resolve the crisis.
 - ✓ **Improve the plan for responding to the next crisis:** Note what worked, what to adjust, and update your crisis response plan where needed.

ADDITIONAL GUIDELINES FOR CREATING CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS

Use the following guidelines as a starting point to help you respond to direct questions from the community about a crisis:

Use the Template Below for Responding to a Comment or Question (website, social media, email):

Thank you for reaching out. For the most accurate information, please see our updates here: [website link]. We'll continue to post new information as it becomes available and appreciate your patience.

Use This Template for a Media Reply (if you're not yet ready to issue a formal crisis response):

We're currently still gathering details. Please check [website link] for confirmed updates. We'll share more at [timeframe] or as information is verified. We appreciate your patience.

Implement the “What we know / What we’re doing” Response Structure:

- **What happened:** Write one sentence that only includes the facts.
- **Who’s affected:** Keep this information at high level (exclude identifying details)
- **What we’ve done so far:** Include the concrete steps.
- **What’s next:** Provide timing of the next update.
- **Where to get help:** Provide phone, email, and links to resources.

Follow Dos & Don’ts for Responsive Communications:

- **Dos:** Be human, be brief, speak plainly, repeat key info, protect privacy, and timestamp updates.
- **Don’ts:** Speculate, assign blame, share personal opinions, over-promise timelines, or “go dark” (fail to provide crisis acknowledgements or updates).



TIP:

No one likes to imagine a crisis impacting their organization, but spending time now to build a crisis response plan ensures you’re ready when it matters most.

- ✓ The goal isn’t to predict every scenario, it’s to have a framework for responding with confidence and care.
- ✓ Even a simple, written plan can make all the difference when emotions are high, and decisions need to be made quickly.
- ✓ Preparedness, transparency, and compassion are the foundation of strong crisis communications, even if you don’t have a communications team.

Pay Attention to Special Considerations When Responding to a Crisis:

- **Legal/safety first:** If law enforcement, insurance, sensitive information, or licensing is involved, consult your legal team to help develop messaging to avoid additional conflicts.
- **Faith-forward tone** (as appropriate): Use compassion, transparency, and service — without sounding dismissive.
- **Access matters:** Consider using plain language, large fonts, and translating your message into alternate languages if your community includes multicultural audiences who speak different languages.



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*If you have questions, need assistance,
or want to share your feedback, please
let us know. We'd love to hear from you!*

*Thank you for entrusting us to walk with you
along your nonprofit communications journey.*

Sincerely,

The Eder Financial Team

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