No. 1

Networking for change

A practical guide
for non-profit groups
using social media

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We live in a hyper-connected world in which technologies

for sharing and receiving information seem always to be changing and multiplying. Recent years have witnessed phenomenal growth in the popularity of platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn. Each day around the world more than a billion people, businesses and organizations use social media to connect with friends, colleagues and clients. If your group isn't already on social media, you probably wonder what all the fuss is about. Then again, if you're reading these words, you may be thinking that it's time to take the plunge. Will it be worth the effort? Should your organization invest the time required to properly manage a social-media presence?

That's the purpose of this guide: to help you decide whether or not to open an account and to show how to optimize your existing social-media accounts. Most important, we want this tool to help ensure that your social-media strategy helps you serve your community. We'll go through a series of reflections and exercises to answer two key questions: How can social media advance your community group's mission? And, are you ready to take on the challenge?

Define your goals

What counts the most with social media is to know why we use it. Are you trying to get more donations? Are you trying to recruit new volunteers? Do you want to increase awareness of social issues? Do you want to create a better relationship between your organization and the community?

Most organizations have a number of different reasons for using social media and yours may not correspond exactly with the ones mentioned above. Your goals might be more specific, or they might be more general in nature. Whatever they are, it's important that you be able to articulate them clearly.

In developing and defining your communication objectives, keep in mind that they should link directly to any mission statement, values

and strategic positioning, change theory, or action plan that your organization has adopted. Organizational communication of any type requires forethought, and ideally your social-media activities should reinforce and be well integrated into your organization's broader strategic objectives. Here are a few questions to get you thinking about how to achieve this.

- What areas of your activity and/or programming could benefit from a social-media presence?
- What are you already doing on social media?
- In what ways do people in your existing social network – your clients, your partners, your municipality or borough, your board of directors, etc – currently use social media?

Often, there are multiple objectives that intersect. Here are some examples of possible objectives:

- To increase public awareness of your group's activities
- To share stories about your impact in the community
- To engage a specific demographic group
- To network with other organizations with similar or complementary missions
- To test new ideas and/or evaluate past activities
- To recruit volunteers, staff and board members
- To keep a record of your events and projects, using writing and pictures
- To replace or complement a website or newsletter
- To publicize events and manage registrations
- To sell products or services
- To mobilize your supporters to action

POST WITH CARE

- **Don't** make every post a request for donations; Do create a variety of types of posts about different aspects of your work.
- **Don't** post comments on everything that comes to mind; Do create posts that are in line with your social-media goals.
- **Don't** think that social media will solve all your organizational challenges; Do use social media as a part of your overall communications strategy.
- **Don't** regard your social media as electronic advertising or propaganda; Do keep in mind that it's called social media for a reason. Strive for a tone that is engaging and welcoming, not scolding and opinionated.
- **Don't** use your organization's social-media account like you would your personal account; Do stay on-message and on-brand in all your posts.

The space for posting messages via social media is severely limited, and this design requires that users use words economically. It is important to develop a well-honed "pitch" that can quickly convey what your organization stands for. Let the following questions guide you in crafting core content for all of your online communications:

• What is your organization's mission?
• What does your organization do (through programs, activities, etc) to fulfil that mission?
• How can you use social media to strengthen and support your mission?

You can always recycle and adapt the language of these pitches whenever you need a pithy turn of phrase for other forms of communication, too, such as your website or blog, your newsletter, press releases or fundraising appeals – wherever the goal is to persuade readers of your organization's worth. Practise your message on fellow staff and volunteers, then assume your organization's identity and make it come to life on social media.

TELL YOUR STORY

Anyone coming across your organization's social-media page will need a reason to stick around, so it pays to put some effort into creating a good impression. Ask yourself, if you were writing the biography of your organization, what would you write on the back cover? Visitors are likely to be looking for answers to a few basic questions such as:

• Who are we? • How did our organization begin? • What do we do?
• What is the problem we are trying to solve? • What is our solution to this problem? • Why and how are we credible? • What are our core values? • Do we have concrete examples of how we live them?
• What do we bring to society that is unique? • What are some of our major successes?

KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE(S)

In marketing, using the same language for everyone just doesn't work. Organizations with successful communication strategies know how to distinguish between these different audiences and how to reach out to each of them. Creating imaginary "profiles" of the different people you would like to reach can help you adjust your messaging. For starters, think about those groups that are already part of your network, such as:

• Partner organizations
• Current and potential donors
• Current and potential members
• Current and potential volunteers
• Journalists and media

What kind of language/words/adjectives would each of these groups of people use to describe their problems and their interests? In what ways do your organization's activities respond to these issues?

Social media can be a powerful marketing tool for any non-profit community group, but its impact will ultimately depend on the time and effort you and your team can afford to put in.

References
Centre for Community Organizations (COCo), Social Media Workbook.
https://coco-net.org/social-media-workbook-community-organiza-
tions-nonprofits/

For more information visit:
Imagine Canada: http://www.imaginecanada.ca/
Idealware: https://www.idealware.org/
Nonprofit Marketing Guide.Com: https://www.nonprofitmarketing-
guide.com/blog/

Other Publications
Titles below are included in the *Communication Matters* series:

1. Networking for Change: A practical guide for non-profits using social media
2. Pick your platforms: Four of the world's most popular networking sites, at a glance
3. Less is more: A guide to content style and strategy in the age of online marketing
4. Youth appeal: What volunteer groups need to know about reaching out to young people
5. First impressions: Tips and design principles for crafting eye-catching messages

The Quebec Anglophone Heritage Network (QAHN) also produces the following educational resources:

Cemetery Heritage in Quebec: A Handbook
Why and how to care properly for early burial grounds.

Oral History Guide
Offers tips on preparing for, setting up and conducting interviews.

Heritage Field Guide Series: Security for Heritage vols. 1-10
Series of bilingual guides highlights best practices to ensure the security of heritage resources.

Organized Planning and Emergency Response Assistant (OPERA): Your Guide to Emergency Planning (CD)
An interactive tool for storing and retrieving emergency contact information, procedures for managing a variety of threats, a resources guide and an extensive reading list devoted to emergency management.

Heritage Field Guide Series: Volunteering Matters vols. 1-8
Series of bilingual guides highlights topics that will help and interest those working in non-profit organizations that depend upon volunteers.

Volunteering Matters: Guide to Volunteer Recruitment
A step-by-step guide to help your organization develop its ability to recruit volunteers.

InHerit Handbook: Inspiring Heritage Renewal and Identity Together
How to create great learning projects for schools and communities

The Identity of English-speaking Quebec in 100 Objects
A DVD portrait of Quebec's Anglophone communities in all their diversity

Quebec Heritage News
Our quarterly magazine devoted to history and heritage

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