

Using Social Media as an Advocacy Tool

Social media (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Twitter) has become an important tool for achieving policy goals. Members of Congress and congressional committees increasingly use these platforms, as well as streaming video. Using social media allows you to:

Connect with potential partners and allies. You can expand your group or network by following groups similar to yours and communicating with the members. Offer your expertise, unique perspective, and experience—but remember that people are more likely to share your ideas if you return the favor.

Offer information that will keep people up to date on a given topic. Follow people who have a variety of expertise and interests that can provide you with new insights. When you share these insights on events, give credit to those who contributed to your ideas. Following a variety of stakeholders on social media also offers a way to learn how different points of view are thinking and framing their arguments on an issue. If you need more words than Twitter allows, consider “threading” your tweets (posting several on the same subject in rapid succession). There are YouTube videos and online instructions that can help you develop your social media skills.

Draw attention to your issue. Tag (i.e., include a person’s “handle” in your message) and tweet at decisionmakers and encourage others to do the same. Use Thunderclap (www.thunderclap.it) to get a large number of people posting about the issue. Promote actions such as a letter-writing campaign.

Tips for Success

- Be transparent about who you are.
- Personalize your profile and tweets. Connections become stronger as people get to know you.
- Add new ideas and perspectives to the conversation and reinforce the perspectives of others. Repost and retweet content from people you want as allies.

- Check out trending topics and hashtags; consider whether you have anything to add.
- Use accessible language—try to avoid jargon.
- Respond to comments, but avoid engaging with trolls who waste your time by refusing to listen.
- Communicate with consistency—the more you post/tweet, the more likely you will be to build a following.
- Don’t be afraid to post about the same subject repeatedly, but change your use of words and pictures to retain the interest of people who have seen previous posts.

Additional Resources

- Watch the Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS) Science Network webinar “Social Media for Scientists” for more in-depth advice at <https://youtu.be/cXQILih3uY0>.
- Read “What Makes a Good Tweet” on the Hootsuite blog (<https://blog.hootsuite.com/how-to-get-twitter-followers>).
- See what keywords your congressional members are using on Twitter at www.tweetcongress.org.
- Follow and connect with the UCS Science Network’s scientist watchdogs at <https://twitter.com/SciNetUCS/lists/defending-science>.

Learn More

If you have questions about your use of social media, email us at ScienceNetwork@ucsusa.org. And, if you have been confronted by aggressive social media users, visit www.ucsusa.org/scientistsunderscrutiny to learn how best to respond.