



Social media has become critical to effective emergency preparedness, response, recovery, and mitigation. Emergency management officials use social media to share information and connect with citizens during all phases of a disaster. You already have social media channels to communicate with grantees, members, and the public. Here are some tips on how to use your current social media capacity to support and amplify your disaster management efforts.

HOW SURVIVORS USE SOCIAL MEDIA

SOURCE: <http://onlinempa.usfca.edu/resources/webinars-infographics/social-media/>

80% of Americans expect emergency response agencies to monitor and respond using social media

75% contact friends to make sure they are safe

37% use info on social media to buy supplies and find shelter

25% download disaster-related apps

24% let loved ones know they are safe

18% retrieve emergency information on Facebook.

BENEFITS OF SOCIAL MEDIA DURING DISASTER

- ✓ Facilitates direct engagement
- ✓ Creates trust, credibility, and relationships
- ✓ Provides situational awareness about emergency events and partnership opportunities
- ✓ Provides additional methods to disseminate emergency public information
- ✓ Allows your community to engage in solving problems
- ✓ Meets the public's expectations.

DEVELOP A STRATEGY

Focus on goals, objectives, strategy, and implementation procedures necessary to support the use of social media by an organization, and how to adapt to emerging technologies and communications trends over time.

- ✓ Who is responsible for crafting your messages?
- ✓ What is the level of effort for each responsible individual (or group)?
- ✓ What is the approval procedure for social media messages?
- ✓ How much messaging should be created and pre-approved in anticipation of need to disseminate in emergency situations?
- ✓ What is the continuity plan in the event that a responsible individual is not able to release information?
- ✓ Does your messaging need to comply with interoperability regulations and/or will it need to standardize messaging for dissemination via several channels?
- ✓ Consider partnering with organizations in terms of who shares what information (eg. Red Cross shares all sheltering info). Can you cross-post and reshare to avoid duplication? Coordination is key.

CHOOSE THE RIGHT TECHNOLOGY

There are hundreds of social media tools available for use. To ensure the best use of technology and resources assess your goals and capabilities for using social media, as well as agency and/or jurisdiction-specific privacy and security policies before beginning a program.

- ✓ Monitor how other commissions and VOAD groups are using social media tools
- ✓ Pay close attention to popular community tools like blogs, bulletin boards, etc. and how the public

- uses these tools
- ✓ Answer the following questions about your target audience.
 - Who are you trying to reach and what tools do they use?
 - What are the best tools and methods for reaching vulnerable populations?
 - What are the limits of the tools you are using to disseminate information?

ENGAGE YOUR AUDIENCE

Social media is not just a tool for emergency response, but one that can enhance traditional activities within all phases of the disaster lifecycle, from preparedness and mitigation to response and recovery. Using social media on a regular basis helps to establish your brand as a credible and reliable source for important information, as well as to connect you with the community and existing and potential partners.

- ✓ Do you allow two-way communications (comments, questions, etc.) on your social media posts?
- ✓ If someone replies to, comments on, or otherwise acts on your social media message, do you have policy to respond or acknowledge that message?
- ✓ Consider developing or adapting a flowchart or decision matrix to assist in comment approval and/or deletion.
- ✓ Check your posts and comments often after posting to keep information up to date and respond to questions and requests.
- ✓ Rumor Control: There can be a lot of misinformation circulating on social networks regarding response and recovery efforts. Be sure to tap into and share state and federal rumor control information to dispel misinformation. Only link to verified content.

SET EXPECTATIONS WITH YOUR AUDIENCE

A common concern related to social media is that the public has unrealistic expectations about using social media in place of more traditional channels, such as 911. Many public safety agencies include a disclaimer on their social media platforms, stating that they do not monitor the tool 24 hours a day, that not all posts will be viewed in a timely manner (especially during an emergency), and reminding the public to use 911, not social media, for life-threatening situations. Setting expectations is important to ensure the public understands how to appropriately leverage your social media tools.

- ✓ Assess your community's current expectations for civic engagement.
- ✓ Assess how the public expects to communicate with commission staff.
- ✓ Assess the community's utilization of social media tools.

RESOURCES

- FEMA Online Course
<http://training.fema.gov/is/courseoverview.aspx?code=IS-42>
- FEMA Virtual Social Media Working Group
https://communities.firstresponder.gov/DHS_VSMWG_Social_Media_Strategy_Formatted_May_2013_FINAL.pdf
https://communities.firstresponder.gov/DHS_VSMWG_Next_Steps_Social_Media_Strategy_Formatted_May_2013_FINAL.pdf
https://communities.firstresponder.gov/DHS_VSMWG_Community_Engagement_Formatted_May_2013_FINAL.pdf
- VOST/G Virtual Operations Support Teams/Groups
Virtual Operations Support Teams (VOSTs) organize teams of trusted agents (VOSTies) to provide support via the internet to those overwhelmed by the volume of data generated during a disaster.
<http://vosg.us/>