Social Media and Advocacy

Social media is an important part of developing your state or division unit’s ability to advocate for students with special needs and/or gifts and talents, and the professionals who work with them. Social media tools such as Twitter and Facebook provide platforms for sharing information and engaging in conversation with members of your unit or division, but they are also excellent platforms for engaging in advocacy with members of Congress and the administration. Developing a presence on social media platforms allows your unit or division to develop a public voice and a relationship with those in the federal government.

Below are some tips and tricks for developing a presence on social media platforms, and then using that presence to advocate to your members and to engage in productive advocacy with members of Congress and the administration.

Building Your Own Social Media

The first step to advocacy by social media is to build your presence. To keep things manageable, start by choosing one or two platforms on which to start building your community. Twitter and Facebook are probably the most wildly used and therefore the most suited towards your unit or division’s needs. Below are a few tips for getting your social media platforms launched.

1. The number of followers on Twitter or likes on Facebook are not just numbers. They are people to communicate with! Pay attention to who is liking your page or following you. Spam followers or marketing initiatives may shore up your numbers but they won’t be as valuable as individual followers who will engage in conversation with you.

2. Be visible! Social media relies on immediacy and presence. Spend some time engaging in discussions with other organizations. On Twitter, retweet what other accounts have said, respond to questions and use your account to feature important links, ideas and thoughts. On Facebook, encourage discussion by asking questions and responding to the answers you receive. The more often people see you tweeting or see movement on your Facebook page, the more engaged they will be.

3. Use multi-media. Facebook is an optimal platform for posting photos from events, but it’s also a great place for graphics, flyers and videos. You can cross post these things to your Twitter account as well. Just remember to keep visual media simple, attractive and engaging!

4. Advertise your social media platforms everywhere. Use them in your email signatures; put your twitter handle and Facebook link on flyers, on your website. Visibility is key – the more members and stakeholders you have engaged in your social media, the more effective it will be.

Using Your Social Media Platforms

So now you have a following of engaged stakeholders – what do you do with them? The purpose of our roles as leaders in advocacy for students with disabilities and/or gifts and talents is to engage stakeholders in advocacy and to petition members of Congress and the administration. Your social
media platform is an excellent way for you to communicate both to the members of your unit or division, and with elected and appointed officials in the government. And while the information you provide will be useful to both parties, the methods of using social media for advocacy will differ slightly depending on the party involved.

Social media has become a wildly popular tool amongst members of Congress and the administration. With the election coming up, social media has also become an important part of campaigns as well. In using your social media platforms for advocacy in this way, it is important to keep an eye out for any social media events, from Twitter town halls, to Google hangouts. A firm presence on social media platforms will give you more legitimacy when participating in these events. Continued participation will also net your organization more attention and provide a greater sounding board for getting your message in front of people who can do something with it.

You don’t have to wait for organized events when advocating on social media, however. While its important to advocate without overwhelming people, your advocacy can be a timely question or comment on public statements, new initiatives or new policies. Space for comment will be limited, so it is important to make the most of what space you have.

Participation in public social media events and directing questions and comments at members of the federal government isn’t the only ways to utilize social media. Below is a list of social media uses that will engage and gain followers.

1. Post interesting articles
2. Post success stories
3. Publicize unit or division events
4. Call attention to interesting comments
5. Share photos
6. Crowd source ideas

7. Host question and answer sessions
8. Get feedback
9. Link to CEC’s Legislative Action Center
10. Feature the accounts of inspiring members of your unit or division, local schools, teachers or programs
11. Develop relationships with other organizations and leaders in the special education community
12. Partner with other organizations to host town halls
13. Create graphics to illustrate points and publicize them

The options truly are endless! As always, the most important part is to let us know! Send us links to your profiles so that we can follow and like you. We are a team and our voices will be stronger together – even on the internet!

Twitter: @CECAvocacy
Facebook: http://www.facebook.com/cechq

Twitter
About: https://twitter.com/about
Twitter 101: http://support.twitter.com/groups/31-twitter-basics/topics/104-welcome-to-twitter-support/articles/215585-twitter-101-how-should-i-get-started-using-twitter#
Glossary: http://support.twitter.com/groups/31-twitter-basics/topics/104-welcome-to-twitter-support/articles/166337-the-twitter-glossary#

Facebook
About: http://www.facebook.com/facebook
Facebook and the Media: http://www.facebook.com/fbmedia
Facebook Basics: http://www.facebook.com/help/basics/learn-about-facebook

Tumblr
About: http://www.tumblr.com/about
Tips: http://www.tumblr.com/tips
Tumblr Help: http://www.tumblr.com/help

Google Plus
Google Hangouts: http://www.google.com/+/learnmore/hangouts/
Getting Started: http://support.google.com/plus/?hl=en

Pinterest
About: http://pinterest.com/about/
Getting Started: http://pinterest.com/about/help/

Youtube
About: http://www.youtube.com/t/about_youtube
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