



Using Social Media to Engage Youth

July 2020

Social media allows individuals and groups to network with each other in a virtual environment to share information and ideas, find solutions, obtain community buy-in, and achieve their goals. It can help expand the reach of your programs, engage participants, and inspire action. This tip sheet is designed to help you develop a social media strategy that supports the pregnancy prevention outreach efforts of your Personal Responsibility Education Program (PREP). You will find tips on implementation and guidance to navigating roles, responsibilities, and resources.

WHAT IS SOCIAL MEDIA?

Social media refers to any media that allows for conversation and sharing rather than “broadcast” communication. Watching the news is an example of traditional, one-way, broadcast media. Social media—like Instagram or Twitter—shares information and allows for two-way communication. Rather than just talking to your audience, social media helps you talk *with* your audience.

AT-A-GLANCE: YOUTH AND SOCIAL MEDIA

Youth are increasingly mobile and social online. In fact, 95% of U.S. adolescents ages 13 to 17 personally own or have access to a smartphone and 85% report using at least one online social media platform. Additionally, 45% report being online constantly. With increased mobile access and engagement on digital platforms, social media is a critical place to reach youth to provide educational, entertaining, and informative messaging on your program’s pregnancy prevention efforts (Anderson & Jiang, 2018a).



Adolescents with cell phone access use them for myriad purposes.

Most adolescents use their cell phones to pass time (91%), connect with others (84%), and learn new things (83%) (Schaeffer, 2019). With insight about how youth navigate the digital sphere, your digital and social media platforms can be tailored to meet them where they are and enrich their online experiences.



YouTube, Instagram, and Snapchat are the most popular online platforms used by adolescents.

Most youth use YouTube (85%), Instagram (72%), or Snapchat (69%) (Anderson & Jiang, 2018a). These platforms are key destinations for reaching youth through a blend of creative and informative messaging that leverages video, animated graphics, and static imagery. Popular social media platforms among adolescents are always emerging and evolving; keeping a pulse on them will help you pivot your strategy based on where youth are online.



Social media enables adolescents to expand their perspectives, diversify their networks, and engage with causes they care about.

About two-thirds of adolescents say social networking sites help them interact with people from different backgrounds (69%), while others credit social media for helping them find different points of view (67%) or enable them to show their support for causes or issues (66%). However, only a minority of teens (37%) believe social media platforms are a source of trustworthy news (Anderson & Jiang, 2018b). Youth skepticism about reliable online information makes it important for organizations to establish a rapport through fact-based and engaging resources.

PLAN FOR SOCIAL MEDIA SUCCESS: THE “POST” FRAMEWORK

Social media can be a useful tool for getting the message out about your program, but keep in mind that technology should come second to the people you serve. Forrester’s People, Objectives, Strategy, Technology (POST) method puts people before technology (Gass, n.d.). Use the POST framework process to help you develop and implement a social media plan.

<i>People</i>	<p><i>Ask yourself: Who should you be engaging?</i></p> <p><i>Listen to your audience and what they talk about online. Determine how adolescents are using social media and consider how you can join the conversation.</i></p> <p>Take Action!</p> <p>Spend time on social media to see and hear what people are talking about. Consider using specific keywords to search tools like Hootsuite or Buffer, which let you view posts across Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube. You may also consider using tools like Iconosquare, which helps you search Instagram and Facebook. Examples of key words you may consider include “teen pregnancy” or “teen relationships.” Hashtags also serve as search terms. Try looking up hashtags like #teenhealth or #healthyteen.</p>
<i>Objectives</i>	<p><i>Ask yourself: What are you trying to accomplish?</i></p> <p><i>Write down your goal for using technology, then create objectives that support your goal to ensure that your online efforts contribute to your overall effort.</i></p> <p>Take Action!</p> <p>Meet with your team or partners. Share the goal with your program ahead of time and ask each to brainstorm ways that social media can help meet your goal. As a group, discuss and create objectives that are specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART). A sample goal and objective are provided to help you get started.</p> <p><i>Sample goal: Live in a community where youth help other youth prevent adolescent pregnancy.</i></p>

Sample objective (fill in the blanks): Recruit [insert #] adolescents to serve as youth ambassadors by [insert timeframe (e.g., the end of the school year)] to help inform and implement the program.

Strategy Ask yourself: What will you do to meet your objectives, and how can that impact your work?

Consider these sample strategies:

- Build knowledge by providing a forum for youth to ask questions and get answers.
- Equip youth with information and tools to help generate peer-to-peer engagement.
- Connect partners and community members through events.

Take Action!

Make social media work. Identify one or two strategies that support achieving your goal. Prioritize your list and commit to moving it forward in the next 3–6 months.

Technology Ask yourself: What technology works best for my community?

The following table of social media platforms can help you brainstorm strategies you want to implement. Although most platforms listed are free or come with minimal costs, the resources to maintain them are a cost factor. Think about which platforms can help you be most effective.

Take Action!

Choose one of the tools in the following table. Ask four or five youth if they have used the platform, how they use it, and what they think about it. Commit to using the platform yourself for a week. Write down what you learn and share it with your team.

CHOOSE YOUR SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORM(S)

The table below briefly describes several social media platforms and their estimated levels of effort. This is not intended to be an exhaustive list but provides examples to help your program develop a social media strategy.

<i>Platform</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Level of Effort</i>
YouTube ↗	YouTube is a video sharing website that allows people to discover, watch, and share videos. Users can upload and comment on videos and subscribe to channels within YouTube. YouTube is a free service, with paid options, and offers analytics.	High
TikTok ↗	TikTok is a mobile app and video sharing social networking site. It is used to create short dance, lip-sync, comedy, and talent videos. TikTok is a free service, and analytics are available with a Pro account.	Medium-High
Facebook ↗ pages	Facebook pages are for individuals and organizations to share stories and connect with people. Pages offer analytics and allow for posting stories, hosting events, adding apps, and more. People who like your page and their friends can get updates in Facebook’s news feed. Although Facebook is a free service, it is becoming harder to ensure fans actually see content without using Facebook advertising to help boost the visibility of your posts.	Medium-High

Platform	Description	Level of Effort
<u>Facebook</u>  groups	Facebook groups are spaces created to share status updates, photos, and messages with a smaller set of people. Members are approved or added by other members. Unlike pages, notifications are sent to group members by default after each new post or discussion. Group creators can choose privacy settings: secret, closed, or open to determine group access.	Low-Medium
<u>Flickr</u> 	Flickr is a free photo and video hosting site that allows users to create albums, share images, and comment on images and videos. Flickr offers limited analytics.	Low-Medium
<u>Instagram</u> 	Instagram is a free photo and video sharing app that allows users to transform the look and feel of a photo and then post to it. Instagram posts can support hashtags and are shareable through Facebook, Twitter, and Tumblr. Instagram analytics and metrics can be reported using tools like Statigram.	Low-Medium
<u>Snapchat</u> 	Snapchat is a mobile app that enables users to exchange pictures and videos (called “snaps”) that are intended to disappear after they have been viewed. Snapchat users can add filters, lenses, or other effects to pictures or videos they share with other Snapchat users. Snapchat is a free service and offers analytics.	Low-Medium
<u>Tumblr</u> 	Tumblr is a microblogging service that focuses on short multimedia posts in blog format. Tumblr can support hashtags and can host posts from Instagram, Twitter, Pinterest, and several social media tools and apps. Tumblr is a free service and offers analytics.	Low-Medium
<u>Foursquare</u> 	Foursquare is a geolocation tool that allows users to “check in” and rate locations, interact with fellow users, and even earn awards for checking in often. Foursquare is a free service and offers analytics for business.	Low
<u>Pinterest</u> 	Pinterest is a free site that uses visual collaging, or “pinning,” to collect and organize images and ideas. Pinterest also allows groups to create group boards under one topic. Pinterest supports hashtags and allows users to follow and comment on posts. It offers analytics for business accounts.	Low
<u>Twitter</u> 	Twitter is a service that people use to write short updates, called “tweets,” of 280 characters or less. These messages are posted to your profile, sent to your followers, and are searchable. Tweets can support hashtags, photos, and links. Twitter is a free service and offers analytics.	Low

PLAN YOUR CONTENT

Content strategy focuses on planning, creating, delivering, and managing recent, relevant, and accessible content that demonstrates understanding of how your users think and communicate about the subject matter. It provides structure to your message and should be informed by what your community is talking about and what commands their attention and mobilizes them to action (Department of Health and Human Services, 2014).

- Use an editorial [calendar](#) to plan and strategize your content. Planning can be done weekly, monthly, or quarterly. Planning can include dates of future posts, which social media platform to use, post formats and creative elements, holidays or special events, and health observance days (Wales, 2016).
- Review your current materials and brainstorm ways to break your content into bite-size snippets that can be shared on social media.
- Consider creating a library of posts categorized by topic for quick reference. Include the various creative assets like photos and videos you have available in this library.
- Use a social media management tool that helps you publish your content to one or more of your social media networks. These tools can assist with anything from engaging your audience and scheduling when content will be published to reporting how your content performs.

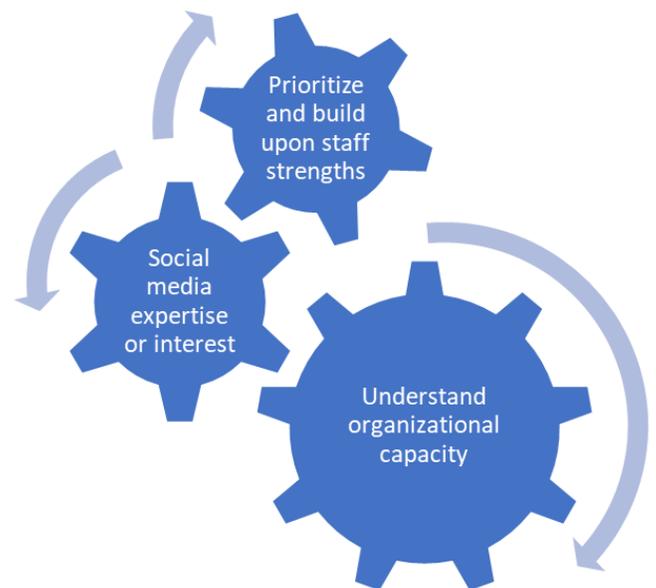
Content includes not only the words on the page but also images and multimedia. Types of content include infographics, photos, videos, presentations, quotes, and audio clips.

Leave some room for flexibility. This will help you respond to hot topics and current events that may relate to your mission.

NAVIGATE ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

One key to executing your strategy is to assign a staff person as a community manager. The staff member should have social media expertise (or interests), understand the capacity of the organization, and be able to prioritize and build upon staff strengths. Your community manager may be an existing staff member or a new hire. The community manager will perform big picture duties such as overseeing an editorial calendar, managing content distribution, and handling the implementation of a social media policy. They may also engage with users on a regular basis by monitoring and responding to comments.

Keep in mind that the time and resources involved in using social media increase as you add more components to your social media efforts.



Social Media Community Manager Traits

MEASURE YOUR PROGRESS

Put a monitoring and evaluation plan in place to help measure your progress. Before you implement your social media strategy, capture your baseline and create a metrics dashboard. A metrics dashboard, which can be set up in Excel or as a table in a Word document, provides an at-a-glance summary of key indicators like views, followers, subscribers, comments, and shares. Generally, the metrics you want to monitor are listed

along one axis, and the time parameters (e.g., weekly, monthly, quarterly) for collecting those metrics are listed along the other axis. Key indicators will vary depending on the platform(s) you choose.

The following core questions reach across all platforms and are important to ask:

- Are you reaching your target audience?
- Are they engaged? To what extent are you broadcasting information versus creating a dialogue that people share, comment on, or like?
- Are the time and resources you are investing in a particular activity providing the outcomes you expect?
- What “actionable insights” have you gained to date that can help improve and optimize your efforts?

Consider using both qualitative and quantitative data to help you assess and benchmark your progress. Qualitative data may include what people are posting, commenting on, or sharing. Quantitative data may include how many followers, retweets, or shares are measured. Depending on resources, you may consider updating your metrics report on a daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly, semiannual, or annual basis.

REFERENCES AND RESOURCES

- Anderson, M., & Jiang, J. (2018a). *Teens, social media & technology 2018*. Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2018/05/31/teens-social-media-technology-2018/>.
- Anderson, M., & Jiang, J. (2018b). *Teens’ social media habits and experiences*. Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2018/11/28/teens-and-their-experiences-on-social-media/>.
- Department of Health and Human Services. (2014). *Content strategy basics*. <http://www.usability.gov/what-and-why/content-strategy.html>.
- Gass, M. (n.d.). *Four-step approach to social media plan*. FuelingNewBusiness.com. <https://www.fuelingnewbusiness.com/2009/01/20/four-step-approach-to-a-social-media-plan/>.
- Schaeffer, K. (2019, August 23). *Most U.S. teens who use cellphones do it to pass time, connect with others, learn new things*. Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/08/23/most-u-s-teens-who-use-cellphones-do-it-to-pass-time-connect-with-others-learn-new-things/>.
- Wales, V. (2016, October 24). *The essentials of an editorial calendar*. Digital.gov. <https://digital.gov/2016/10/24/the-essentials-of-an-editorial-calendar/>.

This tip sheet was developed by RTI International under contract # HHSP2332015000391/HHSP23337003T Task 4 with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Family and Youth Services Bureau.

Suggested Citation: Anakaraonye, A., Bornkessel, A., & Burrell, D. (2020). *Using social media to engage youth*. Washington, DC: Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Family and Youth Services Bureau.



ADMINISTRATION FOR
CHILDREN & FAMILIES