

Social Media Considerations for Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Centers



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Overview

This guide is a brief overview of important social media considerations specifically for domestic violence and sexual assault programs. PCADV and PCAR encourage you to review [Idealware's Nonprofit Social Media Decision Guide](#) whether you already use social media or are trying to decide whether social media are a fit for your center.

Deciding how, when and why to use social media outreach is a PROCESS that requires consideration at every level of the organization. The big picture questions include:

- How do social media help the center fulfill its mission to help victims and end domestic violence and sexual assault?
- What types of social media serve best to meet the agency's mission, goals and organizational capacity?

Each agency is different and each agency's answers will be different.

PCADV and PCAR have designed this resource as a starting point. Sample policies and training curricula from domestic violence / rape crisis centers that have already worked through the decision-making process are included in the Appendices. Idealware's Decision Guide provides research into other nonprofits' experiences and worksheets to structure your efforts.

The Decision Guide
will walk you through
a five step process:

1. Understanding
Social Media
 2. Defining Your Goals
and Audience
 3. Evaluating
Specific Tools
 4. Choosing Tools to
Meet Your Goals
 5. Creating Your Social
Media Strategy
-

Figure 1: Idealware's 5 Step Process

What are your goals for Social Media Use?

Having a social media presence can further your center's mission to end domestic and sexual violence in your community. Thoughtful planning is the key to having a successful social media presence, managing staff/board and community concerns, and protecting and respecting survivors. Setting goals and assessing your organizational capacity for your social media outreach helps a center decide:

- What platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, etc.) you use
- How often and what kind of items you post (image, text or video)
- How much your internal policies are affected

It is important to decide what your center wants to achieve by using social media. Fundamentally, social media are about casual, social interaction. Centers may want to use social media to:

- Engage clients, volunteers and friends in the community to support your program
- Educate and shift attitudes to eliminate violence
- Steer social media followers to your web page or email list
- Promote your fundraising events and campaigns

All of these goals (fundraising, outreach, engagement) may be something your center is looking to do with social media – but it is important to identify a primary goal. You can then begin to think about your message, audience and plan for posting. Participation in social media works best when there is an easily identifiable focus. Keep in mind that you can certainly change your goal over time.

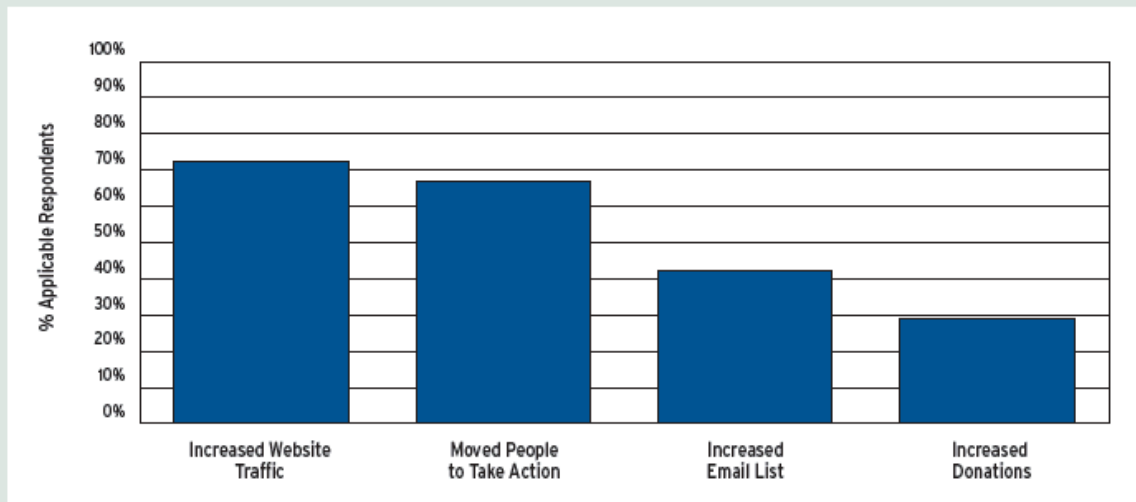
*PCADV and PCAR suggest that domestic violence and/or rape crisis centers DO NOT:

- Solicit information about abuse
- Conduct counseling or client advocacy through social media

Regardless of a tool's privacy settings, use of social media is never 100 percent private. **Information shared through social media may not be protected by confidentiality laws.** However, information about hotlines, counseling, and other services should be included to direct survivors to appropriate channels for assistance.

WHAT DID THE RESEARCH SAY?

In our 2011 Nonprofit Facebook Survey, we asked respondents about quantifiable results like website traffic, donations, email list size, people moved to action, and advocacy actions. Respondents reported the most success using Facebook to direct new people to their websites—almost 300 reported “some” or a “substantial” increase in web traffic attributable to Facebook. Survey respondents interested in moving people to take some form of action for a cause, like signing petitions or other advocacy actions, also reported more success than failure—66 percent achieved moderate to substantial results.



Organizations reported less success using Facebook to attract donations. Just 29 percent saw an increase. Several interviewees mentioned the difficulty of fundraising on Facebook, reporting either that they’ve found it to be not useful at all or that it takes a long time to develop donors on the site. Surprisingly, just 42 percent of respondents reported an increase in their email lists that they could attribute to Facebook.

Figure 2: Successful Social Media Goals - Nonprofit Social Media Decision Guide p. 12

Do you have the Organizational Capacity for Social Media Use?

Organizational capacity = time + staff + cultural readiness

Time Commitment

Do you have the time to support a presence on social media that matches your goals? The time needed depends on the social media platforms you choose and that depends on your goals. Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest each appeal to different audiences with varying expectations of interaction. For some, it’s a daily commitment and for others a weekly or monthly one. See **Choosing Tools to Meet Your Goals** in [Idealware’s Nonprofit Social Media Decision Guide](#), page 29.

Staff

While not all staff need to participate in the center's social media work, it is important to have a team of people involved in planning, directing, posting and evaluating. A small team of three-to-six staff is ideal – each with one or more strengths in social media technologies, your communications or fundraising strategies, and legal and policy matters. A core group could look like this:

- Manager/supervisor – because the group needs some decision-making authority
- Information Technology representative – because hardware and software responsibilities are involved
- Fundraiser and/or communications representative – for coordination of your messages/campaigns
- HR representative – because employee policies can be affected
- Others – board representative, community educator, staffer with expertise to post on social media who is technology savvy and a good communicator

Having a small group of designated staff will ensure that an illness or staff change will not derail the social media effort and will empower a small group to make decisions without having to wait for broader institutional review. Consider how your agency would divide the work of developing and posting content. It is best practice to formalize staff's social media work — write it into work plans and adapt job descriptions as needed. Some organizations have a rotating schedule of staff who are responsible to post. Others have a social media manager who does all of the posting and manages the passwords and accounts. Delivery of relevant and timely information is an essential component for social media success, so it is critical that designated staff be diligent, dedicated, and trustworthy. See “How Much Time Should I Spend on Social Media” in the Idealware [Decision Guide](#), page 40.

Cultural Readiness

The final piece to consider is your agency's cultural readiness to participate in social media. Our work in domestic and sexual violence necessitates confidentiality and privacy. Participating in social media may feel like it goes against those beliefs. Also, programs may be understaffed, underfunded, and overworked. Discussion about the goals of social media and the plan for work division is a great start to create buy-in, but there may be resistance, nevertheless.

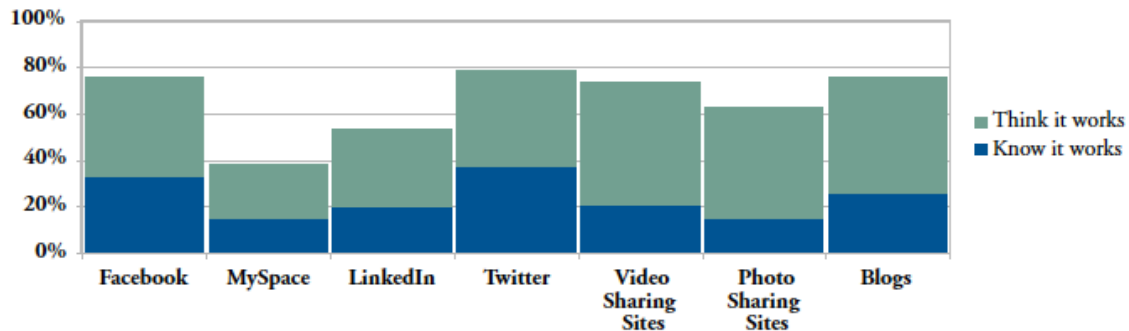
Consider these questions:

- Is the board supportive of participation?
- Does staff share the center's commitment to social media participation?
- Is social media participation written into the strategic plan? If not, does it align with agency goals/mission statement?

WHAT DID THE RESEARCH SAY?

As reported in our *Social Media Benefits Survey*, nonprofits using social media found many specific channels useful for reaching out to new constituents (note that the percentages are of those actually using the channel).

Reaching New Supporters For Your Organization



The results were similar when we asked about enhancing relationships with their existing audiences:

Enhancing Relations with Your Audience

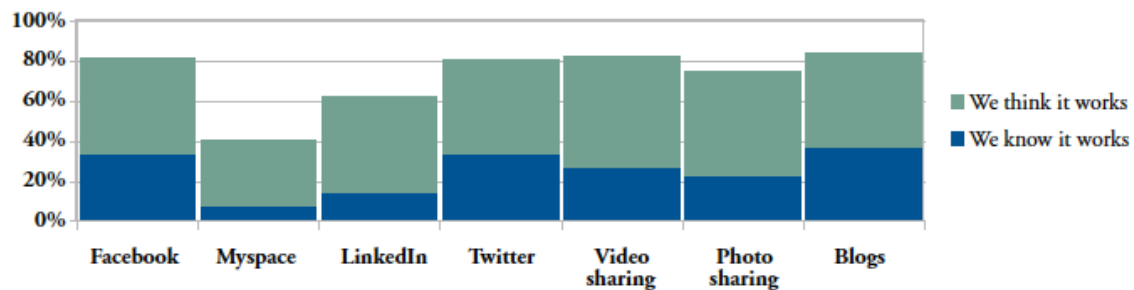


Figure 3: “Know it works” means users see substantial success beyond simple growth in the social media tools themselves—for example, an increase in website traffic, substantive feedback, or new volunteers. Idealware [Decision Guide](#), page 32.

What Social Media Tools/Channels Do You Want To Use?

Social media are inherently about interaction, and there is an expectation from users that postings will be regular, timely to an event or news, and contain something interesting to share with their own social media circle. The viral possibilities of social media are what make them both valuable and challenging for domestic violence and sexual assault programs. For domestic violence/sexual assault programs, the biggest challenges can be:

- Posts from the community (positive and negative) back to the center
- Confidentiality around connecting with community members who may be current/former service recipients
- Safeguarding client and staff privacy in image and text postings

With careful planning and monitoring, challenges can be managed successfully.

Consider Your Audience

Every social media tool (Facebook, Twitter, etc.) has a unique jargon, audience (such as age, gender, urban/rural) and way of connecting users. The Idealware [Decision Guide](#) has a chapter, “What Social Media Tools Are Available,” (page 10) which details the various tools and required resources (e.g., staff time, tech skills) and how real nonprofits are using them to get users invested in their missions. If you have no experience in a particular tool, strongly consider “following” or observing other agencies’ posts on that platform for a minimum of two weeks prior to posting/creating content.

Consider the Pros and Cons of Graphics

Many social media channels rely on images and videos as much as text. Compelling graphics, photographs and videos attract followers and reposts, thus building the online community. However, domestic violence/sexual assault agencies must consider how their commitment to confidentiality works with providing visuals for their social media channels. Images of clients and certain staff members may be forbidden, but any digital picture may contain unseen embedded information that can reveal the coordinates where it was taken. (Review the information about geo-tagging of images in PCADV and PCAR’s [Assisting Survivors with Personal Privacy Management: Digital Technology and Safety Information Booklet – 2012](#).) Also consider that copying images from the web without permission may involve the agency in copyright infringement. (see [Finding and Using Images from the Web](#) from TechSoup.org.) One possible solution for organizations is to develop staff capacity to create original graphics that share key stats or information, but do not involve pictures of victims or staff.

Before posting any pictures or graphics you should ask the following:

- Does this post contain any personally identifying information of a victim?

For example, one center recently opened a kennel to house pets for victims staying in shelter and wanted to announce the kennel’s opening by posting pictures to their website and social media pages. The pictures, however, included several pets of women in shelter and could potentially identify that their owners were staying at the center. Luckily, the center asked the right questions before posting and used photos that did not contain shelter residents’ pets.

- Does the picture contain geo-tagged information that could reveal the location of a confidential center or shelter?
- If the image includes staff or survivors, does the center have informed consent from those individuals to post their picture?
- If the image or graphic is from a website or source other than the center, is it permissible to use it or is the image copyrighted?

Research the Tools/Channels

<i>Tool/ Channel</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Best Uses</i>	<i>Privacy¹</i>
Facebook	The largest online social networking service, designed to connect people as “friends” (unlike social networking sites like LinkedIn that connect people as professionals). Individual users must sign up and create profile pages. They can then “friend” or “like” others to connect to their pages. Instead of personal pages, nonprofit agencies can create Community Pages or Business Pages. (continued)	Resource sharing, event planning, and community mobilization	There are varying degrees of privacy settings on Facebook (which Facebook has been known to change with little notice.)

¹ For more information about privacy settings, see “[Assisting Survivors with Personal Privacy Management](#),” a joint PCADV/PCAR publication.

Tool/ Channel	Description	Best Uses	Privacy¹
Twitter	Online social networking and microblogging service where users can send and read "tweets" or messages limited to 140 letters. Registered users can post and read tweets, but unregistered users can only read them.	Announce "breaking news" or send quick news bites.	
A blog	A website or part of a website consisting of entries or posts grouped around a topic or even around the blogger's life. Blogs are "followed" by others either through a URL or through a feed that delivers the latest postings directly to the follower's monitor.	Attract a following for the agency / blogger by writing compelling original content.	

There are many social media websites that are constantly appearing and becoming popular or dropping from favor. (Tumblr, MySpace, Instagram, Flickr, LinkedIn, Vine, Google+, etc.) Most platforms have online user guides. Idealware profiles those most commonly used by nonprofits – See "What Social Media Tools Are Available, and How Might They Help" in the [Decision Guide](#), page 10.

Building Social Media Practices

Posting and Monitoring Content

Leadership from your organization may wish to help develop policy for social media posts. The Idealware [Decision Guide](#) has a section "Creating A Social Media Policy" (page 48) for an overview of issues to consider. Idealware also has a step-by-step [Social Media Policy Workbook](#) that can walk the social media team through developing a policy that matches its goals.

A policy for social media posts should address the following basic principles:

1. Content of Posts, Comments, and "Likes"

Every original post, repost, comment, or "like" that is made through the program's page should be professional and consistent with the program's core values and mission, and should conform to the program's social media goals.

DO	DON'T
Ensure that information, images and messages are culturally diverse.	Make disparaging comments or remarks about any individual, group or organization.
Share information about issues relevant to domestic violence or sexual assault research, news, laws and policies.	Endorse or otherwise engage in political campaigns or lobbying activities that would jeopardize the organization's non-profit status. If you are in doubt, please consult with your supervisor. Any messaging should be consistent with your organization's position statements, core values and mission statement.
Post information from trusted allied and referral organizations.	Post unverified information, research or statistics.
Respect the privacy of individuals and organizations.	Publish images of, or information about, individuals without their express permission.
Obtain permission before using proprietary information that is not within the public domain.	Post a photo or other information with geographical information that could identify the location of an individual without her or his express permission.

2. Frequency of Posts

Social media are not necessarily time-consuming, but they do require regular maintenance. As a general rule, organizations should schedule a post at least once each day to ensure that the program's social media page is relevant, timely, and visible. It is best to have consistency in the number of posts distributed each day. Some social media tools prioritize a sender's messages depending on how frequently the sender posts. If your center rarely posts, your messages may not get priority over other people/agencies who post frequently. Your message may not get the attention it deserves.

3. "Sharing" Other Posts

The primary purpose of a social media campaign is generally to promote the program and its initiatives. However, social media pages gain more followers when the content includes shared posts from allied organizations and reputable external media outlets. You can support other organizations' campaigns by sharing their posts and asking them to share yours.

4. Managing Others' Comments, Posts, and Tags

Your program should develop a social media policy to address whether and to what extent to:

- accept “friends” into your network
- allow posts and/or comments to your program page

In developing your policy, it is important to remember that survivors and their families, friends, and supporters may respond to postings, share content on their own feeds, and make connections to the program through its social media channels. They may not realize the implications of connecting to the program’s social media. If perpetrators discover such connections, they could escalate their abuse in fear of being publicly exposed. Survivors may wish to share their stories on your social media page, which may open them to character attack, or legal ramifications, especially if the survivor is involved in a civil or criminal proceeding. Alternatively, connecting with a perpetrator may invite negative or malicious comments or backlash.

If your program decides to allow others to connect, comment and post about your program or tag your program in images, comments or posts, you must be diligent in monitoring the site to stop dangerous, inaccurate, or malicious information from spreading. Many tools allow a moderator to review comments before they are posted. See [Practices related to questionable posts, online threats or combative behavior](#) in [“Social Media Practice Guidance,”](#) NRCDV, pages 8-9 (2013); [“PCAR/NSVRC Social Media Guidelines,”](#) National Sexual Violence Resource Center, page 4 (2013).

If your program wishes to restrict outside interaction with your social media site, it is essential to create an explicit policy that outlines the parameters for accepting or denying connections or content. For example, your policy could state that no comments or content are posted other than that posted by designated staff. Program staff must be sure to enable the privacy settings on each type of social media tool in keeping with chosen policies.

5. Establishing Appropriate Privacy Settings

Remember: Nothing online is completely private or permanently erased. For example, even if the social media tool allows a page to be marked “private,” it may still be accessible through other pages. Even though a post is deleted, it is still retrievable. Review the information about privacy in PCADV and PCAR’s [“Assisting Survivors with Personal Privacy Management: Digital Technology and Safety Information Booklet – 2012”](#) and in [“Safety and Privacy on Facebook: A Guide for Survivors of Abuse”](#) from the National Network to End Domestic Violence.

Your social media team is charged with deciding which individuals and organizations to accept into its network, and which types of third-party content to allow. Next, it should ensure its privacy settings for every social media outlet are established to match those policies. For example, if your program has Facebook and Twitter pages that are linked, the program must adjust the privacy settings for each platform. Otherwise, “private” information on Facebook may be public on Twitter.

Scheduling Regular Status Meetings

Regular status meetings will help your program advance its social media goals, ensure consistent messaging, and maintain important privacy protections. Use these status meetings to:

- Review how particular posts and comments from third parties are handled to be sure policies and procedures are consistently applied
- Evaluate usage and engagement summaries to ensure your posts are reaching the intended audience
- Adjust social media privacy settings to account for changes in the policies and settings of each social media platform

Social Media Content and Strategy

Social Media Presence vs. Social Media Campaign

Using social media tools can give a domestic violence/rape crisis center a social media *presence* – help the agency gain supporters and raise community awareness of its mission and services. A social media *campaign*, like a fundraising campaign, is designed to achieve a particular set of targets within a specific period of time.

A campaign [is] basically a time period with clear start and end dates during which you push to achieve a specific goal through frequent, targeted posts... the fixed timeframe helps you set priorities and timing and provides an obvious time to check in to see how your tactics are working. Idealware [Decision Guide](#), page 43.

See “Integrating Your Social Media Communications” in the Idealware [Decision Guide](#), for smart ways to extend your presence into strategic campaigns.

Evaluating Your Social Media Work

Eventually, your program may want to gauge whether the effort it puts into social media outreach is worth the staff time and effort. Analytics is the term for information detailing user statistics such as how many “hits” or times your page has been viewed, how your content was shared, and how people found your content through other sources. Because evaluating social media impact is a science unto itself, here is a brief overview of tools you can investigate. See “Measuring Your Success” on page 45 of the Idealware [Decision Guide](#).

- [Facebook Insights](#) – Facebook allows access to insights for a page for anyone who is an administrator. Through Insights, you can see the reach for your posts, spikes in activity, and a breakdown of user demographics.
- [Tweatreach](#) – This site will tell you how many different accounts were likely to see your tweet and which of those people had the most influence on building that number.
- [Twitter Analytics](#)- Twitter Analytics tracks the number of times people saw a tweet, the number of times someone engaged it and its engagement rate (engagement divided by impressions) and provides a bar graph to show total views (or impressions) of all tweets per day over the course of four weeks. Selecting an individual tweet will break down the exact methods of engagement (link clicks, favorites, retweets, replies) and provide a bar graph to show when people saw it.
- [Visual.ly](#) – This site builds quick graphics that can compare your Twitter profile against someone else’s. You can use it to get a picture of how your organization compares to others in your community or to a similar organization in another area.
- [Google Analytics](#) – Installing Analytics for your website provides information on site traffic, who refers people to your website, time spent on your site, and where you’re losing people.
- [Storify](#) – Through this site you can build “stories” of your social media efforts, which include graphics, visuals, and highlighted tweets. You can use this tool to tell about the influence of an event or response using a common hashtag.

BUILDING SOCIAL MEDIA INTO AGENCY POLICIES

Review Existing Policies and Procedures

Reviewing existing policies and procedures is a necessary first step when deciding whether your program needs to develop additional social media guidelines. Many policies already apply to social media communications, but may need slight adjustments. Staff also may need direction about how the existing policies and program standards apply to personal social media use as well as agency outreach.

Human Resources Policies - Personal Social Media Use by Employees and Volunteers

Regardless of whether your program plans to launch a social media campaign, it is important to address appropriate use of social media by program staff. Social media have quickly become a primary source of communication for people of all age groups, posing unique challenges for employers and employees alike. Even if social media activities take place completely outside of work, the information employees post through social media may impact their ability to perform their job.

Employment case law about social media is not yet plentiful or well established. The coalitions respect staff members' rights to free speech and fair employment. Social media use involves activities that staff members do on their own time and outside of the physical work location. Nevertheless, such personal activities may have professional consequences.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality is the cornerstone of victim safety. The ease with which information is shared through social media can make confidentiality harder to maintain.

Confidentiality policies apply to all communications, including personal social media use by employees and volunteers. Social media use that violates confidentiality includes:

- Connecting with (“friending”) a program participant – It may disclose that the participant receives services from the program or that she or he is a victim of domestic violence or sexual assault.
- Location “check-in” while at work – It may reveal the location of a confidential shelter.
- Messaging or commenting to clients – Posting a “message” or comment to a program participant may disclose her or his status as a domestic violence or sexual assault survivor.

Policies concerning breach of confidentiality should be reviewed to ensure they include accidental or intentional breach via social media tools.

Conflict of Interest

In addition to posing a threat to confidentiality, connecting with or “friending” a program participant through social media also creates a conflict of interest. It is not unlike befriending a program participant outside of work, which is prohibited because it changes the dynamic between the service provider and the participant. Review how well existing conflict of interest policies apply to personal use of social media.

Staff Time

It is important to discuss personal social media use with your employees. Existing policies usually address “break time” at work, but employee use of personal social media at work may need additional information. While an employee may intend to only check a message or notification, what was intended as a 10-minute break can easily become 30 or 40 minutes. Personal use of social media guidelines can be similar to those for personal calls during work time, outlining whether employees may make or take such calls and texts while working with clients or only on break time, etc.

Security

Security issues must be factored into an employee’s personal social media use in the workplace. GPS technology is now integrated with social media and allows social media sites like FourSquare to pinpoint and transmit a user’s exact location. Thus, *even a post or comment that is wholly unrelated to a staff members work may reveal confidential location information.* Location information is embedded into digital photographs. Even “selfies” and images not showing location details reveal location, time and date data about where and when the photo was taken. See PCADV and PCAR’s [“Assisting Survivors with Personal Privacy Management: Digital Technology and Safety Information Booklet – 2012.”](#)

Agency Reputation

It is important to remind staff that personal social media use reflects on their professional reputation and the reputation of the program as a whole. Many social media users identify their workplaces or job positions as part of their personal pages. Everyone has occasional complaints about work. But in victim services, a seemingly harmless complaint about work can reverberate through the community and may deter victims from seeking services from the program. The mission of each program is – at its core – to provide services to victims of domestic violence or sexual assault and to help them to seek safety from abuse. Comments, posts and other social media that mischaracterize a program can discourage a victim in need of assistance from trusting the program and its staff.

However, an employee’s use of Facebook to collectively address work conditions is protected activity. Discussions of wages, workload and supervisors are protected activity under National Labor Relations Act *where discussions are designed to address or improve working conditions.*

Staff / Volunteer Training

Once you have reviewed existing policies and procedures, the next step is to ensure that program staff, volunteers and others who are directly involved in the program's operations (board members and consultants), receive training on the ways your program's existing and revised policies apply to social media use. It is not readily apparent that a certain social media activity may be exposed to a larger audience that may include victims or other community partners. It is vital that every employee and volunteer be trained on acceptable use of social media to avert potential problems before they arise.

Contact PCADV or PCAR for resources and assistance to develop your in-house training.

Human Resource Policies: Job Descriptions

Will you need to update job descriptions or will you create a new position? The answer depends on the level and amount of social networking responsibilities. Most job descriptions include a general catch phrase "other job duties as assigned," which will allow those employees, who engage in social networking on behalf of the organization, on an occasional basis to do so. If participating in and monitoring the center's social networking presence is intended to be a significant job duty for the individual employee, the job description for that individual should be revised.

Critical Incidents

Decide how and whether your program would address critical incidents via social media outreach. Examine whether your critical incident response policies apply to social media. Even if the program does not post about an incident, others may post questions and repost news reports. PCADV provides "When Crisis Strikes: A Toolkit for Critical Incident Response and Management" for domestic violence programs at www.pcadv.org.

More Resources

[TechSoup](#) - TechSoup is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit with a clear focus: connecting your nonprofit, charity, foundation or public library with technology products and services, plus the free learning resources nonprofits needed to make informed technology decisions and investments.

[National Network to End Domestic Violence Safety Net Project](#) – NNEDV's Safety Net Project focuses on the intersection of technology and intimate partner abuse and works to address how it affects the safety, privacy, accessibility and civil rights of victims.

- [Social Networking & Privacy Tips for Domestic & Sexual Violence Programs](#), National Network to End Domestic Violence (2010).

Facebook pages to review as examples:

- [VAWnet, The National Online Resource Center on Violence Against Women](#)
- [Women of Color Network](#)
- [National Sexual Violence Resource Center](#)
- [The National Network to End Domestic Violence](#)
- [Women's Services, Inc.](#)
- [Students Active For Ending Rape](#)
- [National Coalition Against Domestic Violence](#)
- [Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence](#)
- [Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape](#)

[Technology Safety Planning with Survivors](#), a one-page tip sheet that can be distributed to survivors to help them plan their online safety. It is available in eight languages - English, Spanish, Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese, Somali, Russian and French.

[Special Collection: Technology Safety and Advocacy](#), especially, [Online Presence: Websites and Social Media](#), National Resource Center on Domestic Violence & National Sexual Violence Resource Center (2006).

[Internet Safety Online Resource Collection](#), National Sexual Violence Resource Center.

Sample Policies

Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape

- [PCAR/NSVRC Social Media Guidelines](#), National Sexual Violence Resource Center (2013).

National Resource Center on Domestic Violence

- [Excerpts: Internet Use and Social Media Policy](#), NRCDV Employee Handbook, National Resource Center on Domestic Violence (2012).
- [Social Media Implementing Procedures](#), NRCDV Employee Manual Attachment A, National Resource Center on Domestic Violence (2013).
- [Social Media Practice Guidance](#), National Resource Center on Domestic Violence (2013).

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