The NRC-CWDT created this guide to help child welfare professionals use social media to advance the mission of their organizations. You can reach the NRC-CWDT by email at nrccwdt@cwla.org or by phone at (703)263-2024.

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The Importance of Social Media

According to the Pew Internet and American Life Project (http://www.pewinternet.org/), 77% of all American adults (18+) and 93% of teens (12-17) use the Internet. The adults use the Internet these ways:

- 83% look for information on a hobby or interest
- 78% get news
- 67% visit a local, state, or federal government web site
- 66% buy a product
- 61% use an online social networking site like MySpace, Facebook or LinkedIn.com
- 24% use Twitter or another status update service
- 22% make a donation to a charity online
- 13% tweet on Twitter

These numbers continue to increase. Social media isn’t a trend. It’s now a principal way that people share information and stay connected.

“Social media” are powerful communication tools that use the Internet to establish interactive dialogue and to share materials with others. Social media technologies such as podcasts, RSS feeds, social networking sites, text messaging, and blogs allow anyone to create, modify, and share content easily and inexpensively.

Social media can help child welfare programs conduct activities ranging from advertising to staff recruitment, collaboration, networking, fundraising, and finding and supporting foster parents. Social media can help reach potential or current foster/adoptive parents, at-risk parents, past or current foster youth, mandated reporters (such as teachers and doctors), a specific neighborhood, or staff of partner or champion organizations. Social media can potentially boost the effectiveness of a wide range of programs, such as adoption, child protective services, foster care, and youth development.

Videos are a popular social media tool. The following videos help explain the importance of social media and specific social media tools. For those already embracing social media use, these videos can help share the value of social media with others.

Social Media Revolution (theTotalProfit) | Social media is a fundamental shift in how people communicate
Future Trends (mashable) | Current trends and future projections for social media
Social Media in Plain English (Common Craft) | How social media helps connect people and organizations
(Common Craft also offers videos explanations of individual social media technologies)
Us Now (Banyak Films) | Documentary film about the power of mass collaboration, the government and the Internet
Web 2.0 … The Machine is Us/ing Us (Michael Wesch) | How Web 2.0 expands the possibilities for information sharing on the internet
Social Media ROI (socialnomics) | How organizations measure the return on their social media investment
Getting Started with Social Media
For those new to using social media, SocialBrite offers a glossary of social media terms: The Top 100 words & phrases in the social media dictionary.

CDC’s Social Media Toolkit: This guide from the CDC includes information to help you get started using social media—from developing governance to determining which channels best meet your communication objectives as your organization creates your social media strategy.

Building an Effective Social Media Strategy
The book “Groundswell” discusses the People, Objectives, Strategies, and Tools (POST) approach to creating an initial social media strategy:

Who are your clients and stakeholders? What social media platforms do they use? Try to learn a bit about how your audience currently uses (or does not use) tools like Facebook or other social media applications.

Social media strategist Steve Radick offers a few pointers about this process in his “Getting Started with Government 2.0 Guide”:

- **Do some internal research.** Search your organization’s Intranet to see who in your organization is already doing something with social media or Government 2.0. Find out who the experts are within your organization and introduce yourself to them. Have a meeting with them and find out what they recommend/where you might be able to help. Chances are someone has already started doing something with social media internally.

- **Do some external research.** Google your organization’s name and “social media” or “Government 2.0” or “open government.” Find out what, if anything, is being said externally about your organization.

After you figure out who your social media audience is and what they tend to do online, creating a social media strategy is an important next step. Keep in mind that a social media strategy is only one part of a
larger communication effort. Ask yourself these questions:

1. Who are we trying to reach with social media?
2. What goals does my organization want to achieve using social media?
3. What social media sites do the people we’re trying to reach use?
4. What information do we want to share with the people we’re trying to reach?

What does your agency want to accomplish through social media? Is your objective research --to learn more about your clients or stakeholders? Is it marketing --such as raising awareness? Is it persuading people to use a service? Are you trying to further an interactive collaboration with your constituents? Once you decide upon your goals, think about how you will measure the success of your social media efforts. How will your relationship with your audience change? What will look different from their point of view and from yours?

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**Even the Best Strategies Might Need Tweaking**

*If you already have a social media strategy, but aren’t seeing the results you want, Idealware offers some suggestions for how to diagnose and correct social media problems.*

**10 Things You’re Doing Wrong with Social Media**
Current Social Media Tools

The picture above does not represent even half of the social media tools currently available, but as we learned from the Pew Internet report, the current most popular social media outlets in the United States are Facebook, YouTube, and LinkedIn, as well as platforms such as Twitter and Pinterest.

**Facebook**

Facebook is an interactive way to keep in touch with people. Users can view what is going on in the lives of friends and family, exchange opinions on current events, or even get invited to a backyard BBQ. A child welfare agency might use a Facebook page for things like a ‘Child of the Week’ feature, or getting the word out for people to donate suitcases for foster children.

- [How to Use Facebook](AARP) – The Facebook interface is not always intuitive; AARP offers several straightforward guides to basic Facebook usage.
- [How Facebook Works](How Stuff Works) – A more advanced text and video tutorial on Facebook usage.
- Facebook pages from some child welfare and related organizations: National CASA, Utah Foster Care Foundation, Indiana Foster Care and Adoption Association, Children’s Bureau, AdoptUSKids, Hamilton County JFS, National Association of Social Workers

**YouTube**

YouTube is a video-sharing website created in 2005. Users can upload, view, discuss, and share movie clips, TV clips, and music videos, as well as user-generated content such as video blogging and short original videos. Agencies have used YouTube to post video clips of realistic job previews, supervisor training videos, and what it’s like to be a foster parent.

- Child Welfare and related organizations that have YouTube channels include: Hamilton County JFS, Vermont DCF, Florida DCF, Oklahoma DHS, Kansas Workforce Initiative, Cabbarus County NC
LinkedIn

LinkedIn is a social networking website for professionals. Launched in May 2003, it is mainly used for professional networking.

- Child Welfare related organizations and groups on LinkedIn include: Child Welfare, Child Protection, and SACWIS professionals, Health and Human Services, Child Welfare League of America, NASW

Twitter

Twitter is an online social networking service and microblogging service. Users can send, read, and forward messages, called “tweets,” of up to 140 characters. Twitter can be used to promote events, as backchatter at conferences, to respond to current issues, to relay up to date information, and for scheduled real time question and answer sessions.

- Twitter in Plain English (Common Craft) – A quick and simple introduction to Twitter.
- What Are Hashtags (“#” Symbols)? (Twitter) – A guide to using hashtags to find or create topical discussions on Twitter
- Child Welfare and related organizations that tweet: @jimmywayne, @PCAAmerica, @CareForKidsOrg, @WIAdoption, @CTDCF, @AdoptUSKids_pro, @nrccwdt

Pinterest

Pinterest is a social photo sharing website that allows users to create and manage virtual bulletin boards of web-based images. Users can browse other pinboards, 're-pin' images to their own collections or 'like' photos. Pinterest can generate traffic back to your website because the pins link back to the original source. Some child-serving organizations use Pinterest as another promotion vehicle for their cause by posting inspiring images.

- How TexansCare for Children uses Pinterest.
- Child Welfare and related organizations that have Pinterest pages include: Dave Thomas Foundation, Florida DCF, ChildWelfare.gov

Other resources:

- Tutorials on Facebook, Skype, Pinterest, and Twitter. www.gcflearnfree.org/socialmedia
- Tutorial on how to safely use the internet and social media sites. www.gcflearnfree.org/internetsafety In particular, see Smart Social Networking and Communication Tips.
- The CDC’s guide to writing for social media shares the lessons CDC staff have learned in more than three years of creating social media messages in health communication campaigns, health promotion activities, and emergency response efforts. In this guide, you will find information to help you write more effectively using multiple social media channels, particularly Facebook, Twitter, and mobile phone text messaging. The guide is intended for a beginner audience, although some readers with an intermediate level may find it useful too.
Caseworker Response to Social Media
AdoptUSKIds and the University of Texas conducted a survey of child welfare workers, called “Do you Facebook or Twitter?” in May and June of 2010. The survey assessed the attitudes and awareness of professional child welfare staff about social media and its potential use as a tool for the recruitment and retention of foster and adoptive families. There were 746 participants. Here is a sampling of the findings:

- Most (58.6%) of the survey participants indicated that they would use social media if they had access to it. This finding shows that many agency staff are interested in and willing to use social media as part of their work.
- Social media is not just for the young—the majority of survey participants were over the age of 30 (70.5%) and the majority of survey participants used social media (77.9%).
- The most common form of social media used by survey participants was Facebook (70.1%), followed by YouTube (31.0%), and LinkedIn (10.3%).

The survey participants expressed these concerns: “Confidentiality” (69.8%); “I don’t have access to social media at work” (23.7%); “Families aren’t tech savvy” (22.9%).
Click here to download the full results of the survey: “Do you Facebook or Twitter?”

Current Social Media Use in Child Welfare
Social media use is becoming more common in the child welfare field as organizations develop strategies for its use. In addition to the above, here are some examples of social media being used and discussed by child welfare organizations:

Child Welfare Practice:
- Resources from the University of Minnesota’s Center for the Advanced Study of Child Welfare (CASCW) 12th Annual Conference can be found here: “Social Media, Smart Phones & Safety: How Technology is Changing Child Welfare Practice”
- Dr. Dale Fitch of the University of Missouri gave the keynote address at the CASCW conference: Child Welfare Meets Technology & Social Media: Help or Hindrance?
- Hamilton County Ohio Jobs and Family Services uses Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube in the child welfare field (from CWLA’s Children’s Voice Online)

Data Collection and Research:
- An article from the journal Field Methods "Using social networking in subject tracing" explains how the authors used Facebook and MySpace to locate youth who could not be found any other way in the Longitudinal Studies of Child Abuse and Neglect (LONGSCAN)

Public Awareness Campaigns:
- The ACF page on using social media for an adoption campaign.
- The Children’s Bureau, in partnership with the Ad Council and AdoptUSKIds, launched a social media adoption campaign to begin a national dialogue with prospective parents about adoption from foster care.
Social Media Policy, Safety, and Security

Social media use brings concerns about safety and security. Child welfare information is sensitive and has to be protected, while social media is all about sharing information. However, social media are simply a communications tool. Organizations can address concerns by adopting a clear and comprehensive policy on social media, and designating trained people in the agency to manage your organization’s presence on social media.

How to create a social media policy for your organization:
Here are some things to consider:

- Is there already a social media strategy? Social media policy and strategy need to align with each other to avoid conflicts and allow for effective communication.
- Consider whether existing policies need to be revised to incorporate social media. Your organization may need to revise existing policies on communications, anti-trust law, employee codes of conduct, and so on, especially if you do not have a clear strategy yet.
- Adopt a policy that takes into account unofficial outposts (personal accounts), official outposts (your organization’s Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn accounts, for example), and home bases (such as websites, blogs, or internal social networks).
- Consider how your organization will respond to negative comments or replies, crisis situations, and queries from journalists.
- Find your division or State’s social media policies or guidelines and learn them. Print them out and stick them to your wall. If your organization doesn’t have separate social media guidelines, find your external communications policy and see if social media are covered in there. Talk with your public affairs or external communications team and discuss social media. Read the “Getting Started with Government 2.0” Guide.
- If your organization is a nonprofit, read The Nonprofit Social Media Policy Workbook.

Example social media policies
Here are examples of existing social media policies from child welfare, human services, and related organizations:

- Children's Aid Society of Toronto
- Guidelines of Proper Use of Social Media for State of Vermont Government
- Policy for the Use of Social Media by Judiciary Employees (New Jersey)
- Hamilton County, Job and Family Services (Ohio) Social Media Policy
- Utah Judicial Branch’s Employee Use of Social Media
- Example policies from the health care field: http://healthblawg.visibili.com/share/L2TW2w
- Florida Supreme Court's Judicial Ethics Advisory Committee's Opinions: 2009-20: What are the ethical limits of a judge's use of Facebook? and 2010-06: May a judge "Friend" attorneys?
- Seven other states have also issued formal judicial ethics opinions about judges' use of social media
- Public relations firm Hill & Knowlton
- Policy statement from Council of American Survey Research Organizations
Other related policy and security resources

- Youth in Foster Care and Social Media: A Framework for Developing Privacy Guidelines. (Journal of Technology in Human Services, Volume 30, Issue 2, 2012.) In this article, Dr. Dale Fitch discusses the need for policies to help youth in foster care learn how to use social media in a manner that protects their safety and privacy and also allows them the opportunity to tell their stories in their own voices. Dr. Fitch suggests that Critical Systems Heuristics can serve as a tool to develop social media policy and safety strategies by helping multiple stakeholders with different perspectives and levels of power look at all relevant aspects of the issue.
- GFI white paper, “Social Networking and Security Risks” by Brad Dinerman
- Social Networking Privacy: How to be Safe, Secure and Social by Privacy Rights Clearinghouse
- California Office of Privacy Protection’s How To Read a Privacy Policy
- OnGuardOnline.gov is the federal government’s website to help you be safe, secure and responsible online.
- General Tips for Using Social Networks by Privacy Rights Clearinghouse

Social Media and Human Resources Policies
A Human Resources department may be responsible for your staffing and dealing with employee issues. In addition to using social media within the work of child welfare, employees should also have a clear understanding of the internal HR policies for personal use of these tools. The Society for Human Resource Management says 40 percent of organizations have a formal social media policy, and more than half of these policies include a statement regarding the organization's right to monitor social media usage. The policies also commonly include a code of conduct for employee use of social networking for professional purposes (68 percent) and personal purposes (66 percent).

Example HR related policies:
- Maryland legislation prohibiting employers from requesting social media passwords
- United States Supreme Court's 2011 opinion regarding the constitutional limits of employee background checks: NASA v. Nelson (January 19, 2011)
**Additional Social Media Resources**

The National Resource Center for Child Welfare Data and Technology and the National Resource Center for Recruitment and Retention of Foster and Adoptive Parents provide technical assistance to States, Courts, Tribes, and territories. We also provide resources such as our websites, printed articles, and webinars to the general public.

In addition, here some additional resources that may be helpful:

- Center for Excellence in Digital Government
- Twenty Theses for Government 2.0 by Steve Radick
- CNN piece: ‘Facebook parenting’ is destroying our children’s privacy
- Thou Shalt Tweet: 15 Commandments for Government Agencies on Twitter
- Books on social media:
  - The Cluetrain Manifesto
  - Putting the Public Back in Public Relations
  - Naked Conversations
  - Here Comes Everybody
  - Groundswell
  - Wikinomics

Have any questions or comments? Know about a helpful resource on social media not already included in this guide? You can reach the NRC-CWDT by email at nrccwdt@cwla.org or by phone (703)263-2024.

**PLEASE NOTE THAT THIS RESOURCE GUIDE WILL BE UPDATED FREQUENTLY. ANY MENTIONS OF SPECIFIC COMPANIES, ORGANIZATIONS, AND OTHER LINKS ARE NOT TO BE SEEN AS ENDORSEMENTS.**