



Social Media

Overview

EPA defines social media as any online tool or application that goes beyond simply providing information by allowing collaboration, interaction and sharing. Examples include blogs, wikis, photo and video sharing, podcasts, social networking, social news, web conferencing and webcasting. Such tools allow EPA to reach out to people who may not engage the government in more formal, traditional ways. The Agency is using social media to create a more effective and transparent government, engage the public and EPA's partners, and facilitate collaboration.

Why This Is Important

This is important because EPA's policy is to use social media where appropriate to meet its mission of protecting human health and the environment. Because many people are turning to social media for information and relying less on traditional media (e.g., newspapers, television and radio), community involvement coordinators (CICs) should evaluate opportunities to use social media to reach their audiences.

It may also be appropriate to monitor local Facebook, Twitter, Reddit and other social media pages to understand what is happening in the community and stay abreast of attitudes and reactions. Site teams should ensure communications over social media align with information on the Superfund site-profile pages and other communication channels.

Implementation

Social media offer additional venues for reaching communities to engage in discussions, disseminate information, and maintain regular contact. This is especially helpful when decreasing travel budgets may limit the time a CIC or other site-team members can spend at the site and in the community. However, it is important to remember that social media should be used in addition to — rather than *instead* of — more traditional communications channels.

This and all tools in the Community Involvement Toolkit should be used in conjunction with the [Community Involvement Handbook](#), which provides guidance to EPA staff on how EPA typically plans and implements community involvement activities at Superfund sites.

Where to Seek Assistance

EPA's social media policies evolve as new tools and technologies appear. EPA's [Using Social Media to Communicate with the Public Procedure](#) explains roles and responsibilities of staff who use social media, how to obtain approval for its use, how to ensure accessibility under Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and how to moderate comments received through social media channels. In addition, the Agency has [policy and procedures](#) for using social media, and EPA's Office of Multimedia has [guidelines](#) for using social media and multimedia to communicate your message.

Contact your [Web Council Member](#) for approval prior to using these tools. Your Web Content Coordinator will ensure that your social media project conforms to your program's goals, and will get approval from the Office of Public Affairs Office of Web Communications before you begin. There are legal issues and federal requirements that are unique to the government — such as privacy, records management, procurement rules, and staff participation on external sites — that directly impact EPA employees' use of social media tools.

EPA maintains [a list of all the social media tools](#) that employees can use because EPA has negotiated special EPA-only agreements that resolve the legal issues with the standard Terms of Service.

Using Social Media to Communicate with Communities

The public needs to be informed about major milestones in the cleanup of a Superfund site, upcoming site activities, and where to find information



about the site. Social media can help with this, as it can supplement the approaches addressed in the National Oil and Hazardous Substances Pollution Contingency Plan (NCP) and specified in Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA) for issuing [public notices](#). It can also provide CICs with additional tools to reach the public with more frequent and informal updates, allowing them to maintain a dialogue with community members.

Social media may not work in all situations. Before opting to use social media, consider the time commitment involved. Although social media services are generally free, it will take time and resources to plan and find content, provide updates, engage in conversations, and monitor posts. Consider the following as you plan for using social media:

- What are your goals?
- Who is your audience?
- What type of information do you want to share?
- How much time and resources will be required to commit to this social media communication effort?
- How sensitive is the topic?

It also is important to understand how the community you are working with may use social media. Find out if people use social media on smart phones or with computers, and if they have broadband access or use phone data. Look at how other groups in the community are using social media, and consider that internet access may be limited in some areas. This is particularly important to consider when the affected community has environmental justice concerns or lacks access to these technologies.

That being said, social media can be an important part of a communications strategy. The site team should research and identify the most appropriate mechanisms to reach the community members with whom it wants to communicate. Regions can ask about the community's preferred methods of receiving information during [community interviews](#) conducted for the preparation of the site's [community involvement plan](#). Local government and community organizations also may be good resources for determining which social media outreach tools they have used successfully.

EPA Headquarters is here to help. Do you have an event or milestone that you want to highlight? Reach out to the Superfund community involvement team in

Headquarters to have your content promoted on EPA's national social media channels, including the Office of Land and Emergency Management's Twitter account, @EPALand, and EPA's primary Twitter account, @EPA. In some cases, the EPA Administrator's accounts may also be available, especially if the Administrator visits a site. Communicate with Headquarters to learn more.

Examples of how EPA uses social media to advance its mission and tout successes can be found at [Social Media at EPA](#). For example, EPA Region 10 is using Twitter to disseminate information on water quality and other environmental news for the [Columbia River Basin](#). Region 10 also maintains a Facebook page for the [Coeur d'Alene Basin](#) Superfund site community. Using these platforms, the community may post questions and comments for the EPA site team and EPA can provide timely information back to communities.

When Social Media Is Effective

Social media is an immediate conversation, which means that its use often requires a commitment to monitoring the conversation, acknowledging and responding quickly to comments and questions, and providing information in real time.

Not all social media serve the same functions or reach the same audience, but you can use a combination of tools to supplement traditional communications to:

- Connect with a community when travel is difficult.
- Promote public meetings and other site events.
- Share videos, photos and summaries that document public meetings and other events, which can show site activities and accomplishments.
- Engage in conversations with the community.
- Provide regular updates on site conditions or share data, such as daily air quality.

Social Media Options

While EPA does not endorse any particular social media site or technique, information and guidance about the following tools are available on EPA's [Social Media Resources website](#):

Digital news outlets: Thanks to the growth and success of a variety of digital media platforms, such as *Medium* and *Storify*, there are now many media



through which we can post EPA-generated content, including photo essays and infographics. Check with your OPA to determine the approval process for these types of posts, including how they should be credited.

Blogs: Blog sites allow users to scroll through previous posts and provide comments, which can result in a dialogue between readers and writers. See the list of [EPA blogs](#) and read [EPA's Blog Guidance](#).

Facebook: Facebook provides a platform to share announcements, links, photos and other content with an interested community.

EPA has a main [Facebook page](#), as does each regional office. EPA does not create Facebook pages for specific projects or programs. Refer to the [EPA Facebook Guidance](#) for information about how EPA uses Facebook.

In addition to the standard posting feature, Facebook has several other tools that are useful for communicating with the public.

- Facebook Live enables EPA to broadcast events — whether they be public meetings, press conferences, tours of Superfund sites, and so forth — with the click of a button. Facebook Live also allows the public to communicate with EPA directly through the comment box.
- Using the Facebook group function, EPA can create private groups for entire communities or targeted groups, such as [community advisory groups](#) (CAGs). Facebook groups allow EPA to share meeting times, news articles, documents and other relevant content directly with communities. In some cases, communities will create these groups on their own. Speak with your OPA about getting a Facebook group approved.

Instagram: Instagram allows users to share photos, images and short videos from their mobile phones. The Instagram app lets users edit and apply filters to multimedia content before they share it. EPA shares photos on its [Instagram account](#) and others can tag EPA @epagov. Refer to the [EPA Instagram Guidance](#) for how EPA uses Instagram.

Instagram, like Facebook, also includes a live-streaming feature that also allows the public to communicate directly with EPA. The audience here skews toward a younger and more digitally plugged-in demographic.

Twitter: Through Twitter, EPA can engage the public with concise messages or “tweets” of up to 280 characters. Tweets can include photo attachments and links to web resources. Twitter is easy to use on mobile devices, providing a way to engage people who are not using computers.

Twitter is also a platform through which people from around the world, including journalists, celebrities or community members, can multiply your reach by retweeting and sharing your content with others. EPA’s main Twitter handle is [@EPA](#), and the Office of Land and Emergency Management’s is [@EPALand](#). Contact EPA Headquarters if you would like your content to be shared on these or other EPA channels, such as the Administrator’s Twitter handle. Each EPA regional office has a Twitter handle as well. EPA does not create Twitter accounts for specific projects or programs. Refer to the [EPA Twitter Guidance](#) for how EPA uses Twitter.

Periscope is Twitter’s live streaming service. Like Facebook Live and Instagram’s live features, this is an opportunity to directly speak to your target audience through long-distance engagement.

Flickr: Flickr is an online photo-sharing community that can be used to visually engage the public. EPA has a [main Flickr page](#) to engage the general public. By posting photos of the work EPA does day in and day out, you can put a human face on site activities. You can also post infographics and maps. Refer to the [EPA Flickr Guidance](#) for how EPA uses Flickr.

Pinterest: Pinterest is a social network that allows users to pin web content and multimedia to create pin boards (like collections of visual bookmarks). EPA uses [Pinterest](#) to share links, graphics, photos and YouTube videos on topics and events. Refer to the [EPA Pinterest Guidance](#) for how EPA uses Pinterest.

Podcast: A podcast is an audio-only method of delivering information, often focusing on one particular topic ranging anywhere from several minutes to a half hour or more. EPA can develop podcasts, audio files and accompanying transcripts to help the public understand and share information. EPA has used podcasts to highlight the [Indoor airPLUS](#) program aimed at improving air quality indoors.

Wiki: A Wiki is a collaborative application that allows the creation of a site without knowing the language of the web, and most importantly, allows collabora-



tors to update site content instantaneously while the application tracks the changes made. Refer to the [EPA Wiki Guidance](#) on the EPA SharePoint site for more information. Speak with your OPA and the EPA Headquarters web team to learn more about how to set up a Wiki for your Superfund site. A Wiki differs from a site profile page because it is housed on SharePoint, while a site profile page is available to the public via EPA's website.

YouTube: YouTube is a video-sharing website. EPA has a [YouTube channel](#) that it uses as its platform for sharing all Agency videos on the web. Refer to the [EPA YouTube Guidance](#) for how EPA uses YouTube, (which also includes guidance on videos and in-the-moment videos).

In-the-Moment Videos: [In-the-moment videos](#) capture on-the-spot sound bites that can be posted within hours of an EPA press event, press conference, etc. The idea is to create an experience for a viewer who may have missed your event and give them a quick snippet of information to whet their appetite to learn more. Your program office or region should have an approved plan for posting in-the-moment videos. Coordinate with your communications director and YouTube account holder to upload your clip.

Story Map: Story maps are a powerful storytelling tool for displaying text alongside visuals using geographic information system (GIS) maps. Refer to the [EPA Story Maps Guidance](#) for how EPA uses Story Maps.

Virtual Reality and 360° Photos/Videos: Many of the social media sites listed here, such as Facebook and YouTube, as well as media organizations, such as *The New York Times*, already host and generate 360° videos that can be seen using virtual reality headsets. While these videos are expensive to produce, partnerships with potentially responsible parties (PRPs) and media organizations are avenues to explore the possibility of producing a high-quality story about your Superfund site.

Google Groups and Hangouts: Google Groups are essentially lists of contacts you can use to email updates about the status of a Superfund site. They can also be used to facilitate collaboration, such as among CAG members.

Google Hangouts is a video streaming service that you can use to host conversations with the public as

part of a long-distance engagement strategy, or as a means of public presentation or question & answer (Q&A) with EPA staff. It contains controls so that only the host can speak and manage which screens are shown.

Adobe Connect: Adobe Connect is an audio and screen-sharing service that allows EPA employees to share presentations from their screens as part of a long-distance engagement strategy. These webinars can be saved and posted online alongside notes or the presentations from the calls.

Skype: Skype is a video conferencing service that can be a great tool for personal engagement with communities, especially as part of a long-distance engagement strategy for interacting with communities that are far away or otherwise not easily accessible. Skype can be used to engage small groups, make presentations, converse with constituents or the press, and share information with other EPA employees and stakeholders. Skype for Business is an instant messaging tool that can also be used to communicate both internally and externally with professionals who have the service.

Hosting Live Events

Some social media channels, such as Facebook Live, Instagram, AdobeConnect, and Skype, can be used to communicate live with the public. Preparation is key to the success of a live-streamed event, and you should consider both your audience and your medium. Here are some tips on hosting live events:

- Send notices to partners and community members, such as those in a CAG, ahead of time and encourage them to forward the event information on to their colleagues. Be sure to include the time, social media channel being used, and links to the event if possible.
- Send out reminders an hour ahead of the event to partners, EPA staff, and community members to encourage their attendance. These notifications should be sent via email, and through the site's Twitter and Facebook feeds if those channels are available.
- Plan out a schedule for the event ahead of time to ensure that your event keeps the pace you want while also accomplishing its intended goals (e.g. you do not want a flurry of questions in the beginning of a digital presentation to keep you from getting to the core of your presentation).



- If doing a town hall or Q&A, solicit questions in advance and forward the questions on to partners, but not publicly. This will enable you and your partners to generate your own questions and answers ahead of time and allow you and your partners to respond to the public in the moment through retweeting or liking their content, instead of worrying solely about the content you are writing up.
- Photos, video and voice recordings used in EPA multimedia content or social media may require permission from an individual or content owner through EPA's [consent form](#) or [license agreement](#). Refer to [EPA Multimedia Consent and License Forms](#) for detailed guidelines.

Section 508: Accessibility

EPA's content in social media tools must be accessible, as required by Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended. See [EPA's Section 508: Accessible Electronic and Information Technology Policy](#).

If making the content accessible would impose an undue burden on the Agency, or would otherwise fall under a Section 508 exception, provide alternative access to the content (e.g., link to an accessible version of the content on the EPA website from an inaccessible third-party site, or provide EPA contacts for additional assistance, or post a text-only version). [EPA's Section 508: Accessibility web page](#) provides information on requirements, resources, and policy and procedures.

Social Media Tips

General

- Use only EPA-issued cell phones and computers to manage Agency social media communications. Photos and videos recorded on cell phones should be sent to EPA email accounts for records management.
- Remember that you are representing EPA. Make sure that your online activities and content are consistent with your EPA job responsibilities. See [Representing EPA Online Using Social Media](#). Only EPA staff should be posting and responding to social media — interns and contractors must not be tasked with social media.
- Identify your EPA affiliation and use your work email address. Do not comment or edit anonymously. Again, refer to [Representing EPA Online Using Social Media](#) for detailed guidance.
- Monitor your social media content and respond in a timely manner.
- Promote your Facebook page or other social media tool via emails, public meetings, handouts, Twitter, the site webpage, etc.
- Plan your content to coincide with other outreach.
- Ensure posts are timely.
- Post updates weekly or more frequently. Share links, photos, videos and other information.
- Use informal language and contractions, and first-person pronouns. When using social media, write as if you are talking to a friend, not writing a news release. Say, "We'll give you ..." rather than "EPA will be providing individuals with..." See [Web Standard: Writing Style](#).

Getting the Word Out

Encouraging Discussion on Social Media

- Ask for your community's thoughts, experiences and stories by posing broad questions or posting ideas that solicit a wide range of responses. To avoid Paperwork Reduction Act (PRA) concerns, ensure that questions are general and open-ended. (Unstructured feedback is excluded from the PRA.)
- Moderate comments and posts. Review them in light of the comment policy. See [Using the EPA Comment Policy](#) for more details.
- Do not lobby, promote political viewpoints, or endorse commercial products.

Responding Online on Behalf of EPA

- Discuss a response with your manager and obtain approval to respond, particularly for controversial or sensitive topics. Stay within your area of expertise. If you cannot answer a question, refer it to someone who can.
- Respond to complaints if you can help someone, but do not argue, push personal opinions or engage in debates.
- Before responding to questions, consult with other offices as appropriate so your response provides the Agency's best answer.
- For more guidance, consult [Representing EPA Online Using Social Media Procedure](#).



Posting Photos

NOTE: To post photos of anyone other than EPA staff, permission is needed.

- Content to include on photo-sharing sites includes:
 - Action shots of EPA staff working in the field or laboratory.
 - Public events that show staff working with communities and stakeholders to accomplish EPA's mission.
 - Sampling and environmental monitoring equipment.
 - Infographics that convey key points in a succinct, engaging way.

- A limited number of high-quality photos that represent the story you want to share.
- Captions should provide context, add value, and comply with [Section 508](#) requirements. *NOTE: Captions cannot include company names or logos.*

Posting Videos

- Videos can be posted on an official EPA YouTube channel once they go through the Agency's [review and approval process](#). Work with your office's communications director or your region's public affairs director to determine the appropriate channel for each video and the process for posting.