One of the foundations of successful collaboration is communication. This packet highlights several communication tools that will help you collaborate with your colleagues efficiently and effectively. From email lists to Google Sites and social media, it is important to know what tools are out there and how they can help your organization meet its goals. Using these tools is not as confusing or as time-consuming as you may think, so make sure to check out the links and appendices of this document for quick and easy “how to” explanations.

Here is a brief overview of what this packet covers:

Social media: Take advantage of social media sites like Facebook and Twitter to spread the word about your cause, inform a larger audience about the work you do, and to help you boost your organization’s fundraising.

Google sites: Create a website free of charge that you can edit, add content to, and share with the public.

Email lists: No need to laboriously type in each individual email address when you want to send a group message. You can use Google Groups to send group emails quickly, share content, calendars, and control who sees what!

Although this packet’s overall focus is general communication in the context of collaborative work, we focus specifically on the value of social media for small organizations and nonprofits.

Why is social media important?

Social media is a low-cost, effective marketing channel that allows you to empower your supporters to share your organization’s mission. It also makes it easier for potential supporters to discover you. In an age when digital communication is important, tools like Facebook help organizations start conversations about their cause, and foster meaningful dialogue to engage supporters and inspire advocacy.

47 percent of Americans learn about causes via social media and online channels, and 55 percent of those who engage with nonprofits via social media have been inspired to take further action in one form or another. In addition, 15 to 18 percent of donations are referred directly from Facebook in an average fundraising campaign today. Some other key benefits of using social media include:

1) Learn what your supporters are saying and sharing about your organization.
2) Drive visitors to online donation pages.
3) Enable supporters to distribute messages about your organization through their social media presence.
4) Rapidly respond to unforeseen events.
5) Acquire new contacts and build support for your cause.
6) Allow supporters to share their voice through feedback forums.

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What kinds of social media are relevant to forest collaboratives?

Facebook is the world’s largest social networking site, with 1.15 billion users. Users create personal profiles, add other users as friends, exchange messages, join common-interest user groups and connect with nonprofits and businesses.

Twitter is an online social networking and microblogging service that enables users to send and read “tweets,” which are text messages limited to 140 characters.

Social media policies: What they are, why we need them, and how to make one

A social media policy is a code of conduct that provides guidelines for employees and volunteers who post content on the internet, either as a part of their job or in their personal life.

A social media policy for your organization helps to ensure your online presence remains professional. It can address how to respond with tact to controversial comments posted on your Facebook page as well as providing guidance for how staff members are expected to approach online communications. Perhaps most importantly, a clear social media policy will help your organization use social media tools more effectively.

Creating a social media policy usually involves identifying your organization’s objectives (building awareness, driving action, etc.), evaluating your online objectives in relation to your organization’s overall goals, determining your audience, forming guidelines (how to use social media tools effectively, and the parameters around organizational and personal use), and finally, creating a manual with your organization’s social media plan and best practices.

It is important for both employees and volunteers to understand that using social media as a platform to discuss organizational issues effectively makes them an organizational spokesperson. A social media policy provides clear guidelines about what an organization expects from its employees and volunteers, and what their responsibilities are regarding social media use. However, a social media policy is not useful unless everyone within an organization knows the guidelines and sticks to them!

If you are interested in creating a social media policy for your organization, see the social media policy template in Appendix A (page 9).
Facebook: Setting up your page

The goal of a Facebook page is to get people engaged by “liking,” “sharing,” or commenting on your organization’s posts. A Facebook page requires basic information about your organization, a profile picture (usually a logo), and a cover photo.

Maintaining a Facebook page requires a fairly minimal time commitment to engage your audience by posting pictures, general information, news and events, as well as responding to supporter’s comments. However, to successfully connect to your audience there will need to be a consistent effort over time.

Wondering what you will post? You can post information about where and when your next field tour will be, or important science and economic information relating to your work. Other suggestions: post facts about the projects the collaborative has worked on, general information about forestry and forestlands in your area, or news stories published about your organization. The bottom line is that you have flexibility in what you post. Just don’t forget that this is an opportunity to spread awareness about both the work that your organization does and the larger issues it addresses!

The next few pages will address the things your organization should think about when considering opening a Facebook account, best practices for how to engage your audience, and more detailed examples of content your organization can post.

Things to think about before you get started

Any organization’s page created on Facebook is linked to a personal account. Whoever sets up the page will be the administrator of that page, however, the personal account and the organization page will not be linked publicly. For example, no one will know who created the organization’s Facebook page. If you create your organization’s page and would like other people to have editing capabilities, it is possible to add additional administrators to the page who can then edit content, post, and respond to supporters.

Organizations have several different options when setting up a Facebook page. You will need to decide if you would prefer to set up a page as an organization, an NGO, or a nonprofit. There is also the option to sign up as a community or cause in which case you would be able to accept direct donations through your Facebook page, but this option is only available to those organizations who have 501(c)3 status.

Getting your page up and running

Information you will need to get your page up and running include:

- Profile picture and cover photo (the profile picture is often a logo),
- Facebook web address: This is important as it is the link that you use to direct people to your page in the future, and it cannot be changed once it is submitted. It should be something simple and include the name of your organization. For example, Sustainable Northwest’s Facebook web address is: https://www.facebook.com/sustainablenorthwest
- Organization mission statement, organization description, and contact information.

Before you invite people to “Like” your page, develop it and add some content such as pictures from past field tours, and links to relevant stories, articles, websites, and blog posts about your collaborative. You can also create events for your meetings and provide updates on important policy developments. Once you have uploaded content to your page (or even before), develop a strategy for who you would like to invite to “Like” the page and how you would like to continue to engage people over time.
Facebook best practices for engaging supporters

**Post pictures!** This is hands down the most important piece of advice for Facebook best practices. Images often engage people more than words and photo essays are quite effective in getting a message across. Images are the most liked and shared form of post, especially when they tell a story.

- The Facebook cover photo is particularly important as it is the first thing people will see on your page, and they will associate this image with your organization.
- When posting website links, upload a photo directly to Facebook, and create a post that contains the link to the website.

**Post inspirational quotes along with facts and figures!** Once a week share a statistic and a quote on your Facebook page. Imbed quotes and stats on photos to make the message more striking. If you have stats or quotes on your page you can link them to your website and increase traffic.

**Schedule Updates!**

- How often? Advice varies, but in general it is appropriate to **post 1 to 5 times per day.** There is not a hard and fast rule. Some social media “gurus” say no more than 1 post per day, while others feel that you can’t engage properly without 2 to 5 posts a day. Find your own target by testing your audience and measuring what works best.
- When? Choosing when to post depends on your audience. Will people be more likely to read your posts in the mornings, evenings, weekdays or weekends?
- Don’t forget you can schedule posts by using the Facebook Scheduling tool, which is a tiny clock icon at the bottom left of your update box.
- In general, it is best to **be consistent and responsive.** Try to be aware of when your community will be most engaged.
- Some organizations abide by the 70/20/10 rule:
  - **70% value content.** The majority of your activity should add value to your community. Post content that is interesting, informative, entertaining or inspiring.
  - **20% shared content.** Sharing other people’s ideas or Facebook posts. This could even be your own communities’ content.
  - **10% promotional content.** This is when you promote your services, events, donor drives, your website, or anything that is predominantly promotional in nature.

**Call Your Supporters To Action!**

Asking your community to engage with you can be an effective way of **energizing your followers.** A few types of calls to action on Facebook include:

- Interesting questions – short, easy, and quickly answered.
- Action images – images with a specific call to action, such as asking people to like, comment or share can increase the popularity of your post.
- A “teasing” image – something as simple as including an interesting, yet mysterious photo with a link to entice followers to “click here” to a story, video, report or other information.
- Call to action – craft something that answers the question: “What’s in it for me?”
Use Facebook Tabs!

You can customize certain Facebook apps so that you can integrate event announcements, google maps, and sign-up sheets for email lists on your organization’s page.

Celebrate your organization's milestones!

If you meet a fundraising goal or finish a project let your supporters know and encourage them to share your accomplishments.

Want to know more? Here are links to some useful Facebook resources!

- Building your presence with Facebook Pages: A guide for causes and nonprofits
- The Complete Facebook Guide for Small Nonprofits
- 10 Facebook Guides & Blog Posts Every Nonprofit Should Read
Twitter: A brief introduction

Twitter is a platform where users share their thoughts, news, and information in 140 characters of text or less. Users “follow” one another in order to listen to and converse with specific people or organizations. While Twitter is perhaps not ideal for every organization, it can be a powerful tool to spread the word about your cause.

If you are interested in trying Twitter, here are three basic steps you will need to follow:

1) Create a Twitter account

Creating an account will involve picking a Twitter username and writing a bio. Be sure to pick a username that is associated with your organization, and when you write your bio make it clear and concise. You want to tell people what you do and why it’s important in just one sentence if possible.

The organization “charity: water” provides a good example of a simple and clear bio: “charity: water is a non-profit organization bringing clean and safe drinking water to people in developing nations.”

The next thing you’ll have to do is decide on a profile picture. We suggest staying away from using the regular Twitter logo as it immediately indicates you do not take social media seriously. The safest bet is to just use your organization’s logo, if you have one.

Lastly, you will want to choose a background for your account. Twitter provides free backgrounds to choose from.

2) Follow and be followed

Once you have your account set up, you will want to start following people. Follow people who might be interested in your organization and from whom you might be able to gain some knowledge and insight. With any luck, they’ll follow you back. You can find people using Twitter’s “Who to Follow” tool or you can find and follow lists of people. Just remember not to go overboard on following people as it is usually a good idea to stay close to a 1:1 ratio of number of followers vs. number you are following.
3) Share and connect

This is where tweeting comes in! **What is a tweet?** It's a message made up of a maximum of 140 characters that can be seen by anyone on Twitter. Target your tweets to a particular audience and try to use “hashtags” (#) before your **keywords**. This allows people searching for these keywords to find your tweets. Here's an example:

"1 in 8 people on the planet drinks water that's likely to make them sick #socialchange #charity #philanthropy"

The above message is a great tweet because it helps people understand the cause without being too self-promotional. You tweet to add value to the conversation: **teach people about your cause, help them, and inspire them with quotes and stories.** Once in a while, throw in some tweets about your organization: tell them about a fundraiser, share statistics, pictures, or ask people to sign a petition.

Twitter is about **engaging, sharing and being part of a very big conversation.** Spend time listening to what others are saying and respond to them. The main point is to engage. Experiment and see what works for your organization. If you want to know more, check out this link: [Twitter for organizations and nonprofits](#).

**Google Sites**

Google Sites is a [web page creation tool](#) offered by Google as part of the Google Apps Productivity Suite. The goal of Google Sites is for anyone to be able to create a website where **multiple people can collaborate** and **share files**. This is a great option for groups that may not have a large budget (or any budget at all) to spend on a website since **Google Sites is FREE**.

Once a site has been created, people can work together to add file attachments, information from other Google applications (like Google Docs, Google Calendar, YouTube, and Picasa), and new free-form content. **Editing a site is as easy as working with a Word document**, and you are able to control who has access, whether it is just yourself, your team, or your whole organization. You can even **publish sites** so that they are available to everyone around the world.

Before you create a Google Site, however, there are a few things to consider:

- **Do you already have a Google account?**
  You will need to create a Google account in order to set up a Google Site. Setting up an account is very easy and it does not mean that you need to change your email address. For more information, click [here](#).

- **Do you want to use a Google template?**
  Using a template is by far the easiest way to go when you are setting up your Google Site. There are many templates and they can be edited to fit your needs. Click [here](#) to check them out and see which one might work for your organization. If you decide you do not want to create a template, you can also start from scratch; this will just take a bit more time!

- **What kind of information do you want to include on your website?**
  Most standard websites have certain tabs to direct visitors, such as: who we are, what we do, history, and contact us. Think about what you want your website to include. For example, do you want a place where people can click and see relevant articles relating to your organization’s calendar of events, or meeting minutes or readings that they might find useful? Once you know what kind of content you will put on the site, you can begin crafting its design.
Email Lists

An email list distributes messages to subscribers on an electronic mailing list. You send one email message to a group email address, and the software sends the email to all of the group’s subscribers, eliminating the need to type in individual email addresses or “reply all” to a large email chain.

There are several key advantages to using an email list:

- An email list can be moderated by the owner to include or exclude subscribers.
- An email list has a searchable web archive option. It can be configured to create a comprehensive archive of postings. The postings can be searched on the list management site to find important content quickly.
- An email list facilitates easier communication with your colleagues.

Want to create an email list for your collaborative group?

Google Groups is one of the most popular applications currently being used for group emails and data sharing. Google groups provides flexibility for how list members receive emails (every individual email, one daily summary email, and/or viewed online). In addition, the Google Suite of Apps allows you to easily share documents and calendars with your group.

Google Groups provides you with the option of setting up different types of groups that serve different purposes and have different workflows. For example, you can set up an email list group, which is a group where all of the communication takes place using email, or, you can set up a web forum that allows communication using both email and the Google Groups user interface.

It is very easy to create a Google Group. You just have to provide a group name and description, create an email address, and decide whether you will make the group public or not. Once that’s done, you can start inviting members to join your group or adding them directly. As the owner of the Group, you will have control over who can see group content, who can join, whether or not messages need to be moderated, and more.
Appendix A: Social Media Strategy Template

1. Define your objectives:

List the primary objectives you hope to accomplish with the creation of your social media presence.

Define how these objectives support your organization’s mission.

2. Define your audience:

Who are you trying to reach through social media? Connect your audience with your goals to ensure you’re engaging the best stakeholders to meet your community engagement objectives.

3. Content strategy:

From where are you going to pull content? Is it content from an outside source? Is it appropriate based on your objectives and audiences?

Will a member of your organization develop original written or photographic content?

4. Networks:

Identify the specific social media networks you will use to promote stories and engage with your audience.

5. Staff and training:

Who will be responsible for implementation? How many hours per week will your organization dedicate to social media?

Create a job description with specific responsibilities.

6. Monitoring and moderating comments:

Successful social media engagement is founded upon interaction. Comments are a main source of that interaction. By encouraging comments you promote audience participation, thus making your site more appealing and valuable. However, not all audience action is positive, and moderation is necessary to protect your site from inappropriate comments. Comments containing vulgarity, attacks on any individual or group, and spam should be discouraged. How will you monitor comments?

7. Measuring success:

Determine how you plan to measure your site’s success. Each social network has its own reporting tools, but look for other tangible measurements such as increased web traffic or posted stories. Then identify specific metrics (such as follower count or engagement) and determine what will make a successful presence for your group.
Appendix B: Social media policy example

The following text was pulled directly from a Nonprofit Marketing Guide post by Kivi Leroux Miller, which can be viewed [here](http://socialmedia.policytool.net).

The Rough Draft Social Media Policy below was created using the Policy Tool for Social Media at [http://socialmedia.policytool.net](http://socialmedia.policytool.net). The answers to the interview questions in the tool were crowdsourced through GotoWebinar polling during the April 28, 2010 webinar presented by [http://NonprofitMarketingGuide.com](http://NonprofitMarketingGuide.com) on “Creating a Social Media Policy for Your Nonprofit.” About 30 nonprofits from across the U.S. participated in the polling.

It is recommended that you review the social media policy in “Social Media, Risk, and Policies for Associations” by SocialFish and Croydon Consulting and especially the section on “Alternative Language for Key Policy Points” for suggestions on ways to improve this draft. You will also find many social media policies bookmarked, along with additional guidance, at [http://delicious.com/ecoscribe/social-media-policy](http://delicious.com/ecoscribe/social-media-policy).

OUR NONPROFIT sample social media policy

This policy governs the publication of and commentary on social media by employees of OUR NONPROFIT and its related companies (“OUR NONPROFIT”). For the purposes of this policy, social media means any facility for online publication and commentary, including without limitation blogs, wiki’s, social networking sites such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Flickr, and YouTube. This policy is in addition to and complements any existing or future policies regarding the use of technology, computers, e-mail and the internet.

OUR NONPROFIT employees are free to publish or comment via social media in accordance with this policy. OUR NONPROFIT employees are subject to this policy to the extent they identify themselves as an OUR NONPROFIT employee (other than as an incidental mention of place of employment in a personal blog on topics unrelated to OUR NONPROFIT).

Notwithstanding the previous section, this policy applies to all uses of social media, including personal, by OUR NONPROFIT employees who are (describe employees who this applies to outside of work as well by title or job responsibilities), as their position with OUR NONPROFIT would be well known within the community. Publication and commentary on social media carries similar obligations to any other kind of publication or commentary. All uses of social media must follow the same ethical standards that OUR NONPROFIT employees must otherwise follow.

Setting up social media

Assistance in setting up social media accounts and their settings can be obtained from OUR NONPROFIT’s (fill in the blank, or delete if you don’t want to help employees with this).

Don’t tell secrets

It’s perfectly acceptable to talk about your work and have a dialog with the community, but it’s not okay to publish confidential information. Confidential information includes things such as unpublished details about our software, details of current projects, future product ship dates, financial information, research, and trade secrets. We must respect the wishes of our corporate customers regarding the confidentiality of current projects. We must also be mindful of the competitiveness of our industry.

Protect your own privacy

Privacy settings on social media platforms should be set to allow anyone to see profile information similar to what would be on the OUR NONPROFIT website. Other privacy settings that might allow others to post information or see information that is personal should be set to limit access. Be mindful of posting information that you would not want the public to see.
Be honest

Do not blog anonymously, using pseudonyms or false screen names. We believe in transparency and honesty. Use your real name, be clear who you are, and identify that you work for OUR NONPROFIT. Nothing gains you notice in social media more than honesty – or dishonesty. Do not say anything that is dishonest, untrue, or misleading. If you have a vested interest in something you are discussing, point it out. But also be smart about protecting yourself and your privacy. What you publish will be around for a long time, so consider the content carefully and also be cautious about disclosing personal details.

Respect copyright laws

It is critical that you show proper respect for the laws governing copyright and fair use or fair dealing of copyrighted material owned by others, including OUR NONPROFIT own copyrights and brands. You should never quote more than short excerpts of someone else’s work, and always attribute such work to the original author/source. It is good general practice to link to others’ work rather than reproduce it.

Respect your audience, OUR NONPROFIT, and your coworkers

The public in general, and OUR NONPROFIT’s employees and customers, reflect a diverse set of customs, values and points of view. Don’t say anything contradictory or in conflict with the OUR NONPROFIT website. Don’t be afraid to be yourself, but do so respectfully. This includes not only the obvious (no ethnic slurs, offensive comments, defamatory comments, personal insults, obscenity, etc.) but also proper consideration of privacy and of topics that may be considered objectionable or inflammatory – such as politics and religion. Use your best judgment and be sure to make it clear that the views and opinions expressed are yours alone and do not represent the official views of OUR NONPROFIT.

Protect OUR NONPROFIT customers, business partners, and suppliers

Customers, partners or suppliers should not be cited or obviously referenced without their approval. Never identify a customer, partner or supplier by name without permission and never discuss confidential details of a customer engagement. It is acceptable to discuss general details about kinds of projects and to use non-identifying pseudonyms for a customer (e.g., Customer 123) so long as the information provided does not violate any non-disclosure agreements that may be in place with the customer or make it easy for someone to identify the customer. Your blog is not the place to “conduct business” with a customer.

Controversial issues

If you see misrepresentations made about OUR NONPROFIT in the media, you may point that out. Always do so with respect and with the facts. If you speak about others, make sure what you say is factual and that it does not disparage that party. Avoid arguments. Brawls may earn traffic, but nobody wins in the end. Don’t try to settle scores or goad competitors or others into inflammatory debates. Make sure what you are saying is factually correct.

Be the first to respond to your own mistakes

If you make an error, be up front about your mistake and correct it quickly. If you choose to modify an earlier post, make it clear that you have done so. If someone accuses you of posting something improper (such as their copyrighted material or a defamatory comment about them), deal with it quickly. Best to remove it immediately to lessen the possibility of a legal action.

Think about consequences

For example, consider what might happen if a OUR NONPROFIT employee is in a meeting with a customer or prospect,
and someone on the customer’s side pulls out a print-out of your blog and says “This person at OUR NONPROFIT says that product sucks.”

Saying “Product X needs to have an easier learning curve for the first-time user” is fine; saying “Product X sucks” is risky, unsubtle and amateurish. Once again, it’s all about judgment: using your blog to trash or embarrass OUR NONPROFIT, our customers, or your co-workers, is dangerous and ill-advised.

**Disclaimers**

Many social media users include a prominent disclaimer saying who they work for, but that they’re not speaking officially. This is good practice and is encouraged, but don’t count on it to avoid trouble – it may not have much legal effect. The Communications Director can provide you with applicable disclaimer language and assist with determining where and how to use that.

**Don’t forget your day job.**

Make sure that blogging does not interfere with your job or commitments to customers.

**Social media tips**

The following tips are not mandatory, but will contribute to successful use of social media. The best way to be interesting, stay out of trouble, and have fun is to write about what you know. There is a good chance of being embarrassed by a real expert, or of being boring if you write about topics you are not knowledgeable about.

Quality matters. Use a spell-checker. If you’re not design-oriented, ask someone who is whether your blog looks decent, and take their advice on how to improve it.

The speed of being able to publish your thoughts is both a great feature and a great downfall of social media. The time to edit or reflect must be self-imposed. If in doubt over a post, or if something does not feel right, either let it sit and look at it again before publishing it, or ask someone else to look at it first.

**Enforcement**

Policy violations will be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including termination for cause.

**Appendix C: Social Media Useful Links**

- [Social media, risk, and policies for associations](#)
- [Create a social media policy for your nonprofit](#)
- [10 must haves for your social media policy](#)
- [Twitter 101 for nonprofits](#)
- [Nonprofit Social Media Policy Workbook](#)
- [National Council of Nonprofits: Social media links](#)