

# Social media – What's in it for my foundation?

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Employing current social media technologies that are inexpensive and easy to use is a manageable way to attract new donors, engage members of the next generation, and strengthen relationships with stakeholders. Social media provide an ongoing multi-way flow of information that helps others better understand the impact of philanthropy, and this is essential in how we connect across sectors and borders.



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## What are social media and how could they work for foundations?

From transmitting real time news through blogs; bringing a new generation of donors onboard through online giving platforms; inviting feedback and conversation through online discussion forums; or creating imaginative resources through online databases and libraries; social media are colossal players in the current

technological landscape, and if incorporated in our everyday work effectively, could help support our purpose, mission, and role in the communities we serve.

While traditional media (e.g. newspapers, film, and television) represent a one-way flow of information, social media (typically via Internet and mobile devices) represent a multidirectional exchange of information, news, views and entertainment. For foundations and other organisations in the non-profit sector, the social media movement carries significant value – it can transform the way we communicate our work, strengthen our collaborative efforts, and engage a much larger audience in our mission. The following are some examples of how this is being done.

### Donor engagement

Social networking tools such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and LinkedIn – when supported by and implemented throughout a foundation's culture – could extend the reach of board members, trustees, and volunteers as they work to build better and stronger relationships with donor communities. The Community Foundation of Ireland, for example, has developed standards that encourage its staff to successfully use social media to advance the foundation's mission. Chief Executive Tina Roche explains that, "The foundation is also piloting a new approach to reporting this September (2010) – we will give Flip video cameras to six grant recipient organisations, which will then use the cameras to demonstrate the impact of the grant instead of the traditional written form or

report. We'll then upload the videos on to our YouTube channel for donors and others to see."

By identifying social media tools and outlining how they can be best used, the foundation has ensured that social media and online networking done on behalf of the foundation are aligned with its mission.

### Grantmaking

While organisations such as community foundations often engage advisory boards to meet, read, and discuss how grants can be directed, social media are tools that can generate more interest in this area of foundations' work as well as make it easier for those involved.

For example, in late 2007, the Case Foundation in Washington, DC engaged hundreds of reviewers in an online process to decide on the top 20 projects in consideration for the "Make it Your Own Awards". Michael Smith, Vice-President of Social Innovation at the foundation, explains that, "Reviewers from all over the country logged in, reviewed proposals online, and scored them based on personal expertise and a rubric provided by the foundation to determine which projects would lead to real community-based solutions and action."

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By making this opportunity available to the public through an online call to action and review platform, the Case Foundation not only invited a larger group of thinkers into the grantmaking procedure, but they also opened up the process to those working directly in various fields, such as service providers, academics, students, and social entrepreneurs, thereby deepening collective knowledge and selecting better proposals, leading to greater impact.

## Building communities of interest

Community Foundations of Canada (CFC) has also used social media to build national and local communities of interest around quality of life issues as part of its national Vital Signs programme, which measures quality of life in a variety of areas. CFC uses Facebook, Twitter (CFCVitalSigns) and a Vital Signs blog ([www.vitalsignscanada.blogspot.com](http://www.vitalsignscanada.blogspot.com)) to engage audiences in ongoing discussion and action about the issues that matter most to their communities. Anne-Marie McElrone, Director of Communications and Marketing at CFC, says, "Social media is being successfully used to solicit participation in online surveys, invite grant applications, publicise events and speaking opportunities and invite discussion and feedback. It is also being used to share information related to Vital Signs issue areas such as health care, education and the environment." She adds that, "A by-product of this externally-focused campaign has been stronger communication between community foundations participating in the programme."

## Gift acceptance

Online giving tools, such as those housed by third party companies, are a coherent, yet still expensive way to process gifts online, particularly due to the credit card fees tied to large online gifts. For smaller gifts, however, advances in technology have made it possible for foundations to receive gifts through an online platform that enables donors to review projects and submit contributions. UK-based Localgiving.com, for example, harnesses the information exchange capacities of the Internet to encourage giving to

local charities through community foundations. Localgiving.com is an online giving portal featuring profiles of organisations that have been vetted by community foundations. Founder & CEO Marcelle Speller says, "This platform is engaging in several social media forums in order to interact with the online giving community and raise awareness of community foundations, the charities they support, and their new online presence." By extending the reach of social media to encompass gift acceptance, foundations can truly make social media a part of their work and purpose.

## Information management

As foundations become more involved in research and data collection around issues that they support, social media are a fantastic way to accept, store, and distribute the information they collect. In 2008, Community Foundations of Canada named Vicki Burns as the coordinator of its "Foundations in the Lake Winnipeg Watershed" initiative, a collaborative effort among community foundations in Canada to determine how philanthropy can help address the crisis in the largest aquatic life support system in Western Canada. Among all of the resources that Vicki has created – including thought papers, checklists, and a Tips and Tools kit – is a blog that she uses to communicate with audiences about conditions in the environment, opportunities to become engaged in solutions, and developments in the programme that she manages (<http://canadawater.wordpress.com>).

[www.tcfncfc.ca](http://www.tcfncfc.ca)

# How can my foundation incorporate social media effectively?

Foundations the world over are offering inventive examples of incorporating social media tools into everyday work, programming, and communications strategies. Here are a few ideas on how your organisation can integrate various social media tools and platforms:

- **Identify your foundation's needs.** There is an abundant selection of social media tools to fit a variety of needs, and knowing how social media can best suit your foundation, its programming, and its stakeholders will determine which tools are best for you. One great tool is a social media assessment tool that can be found at [www.danonit.com/blog](http://www.danonit.com/blog)
- **Learn about what other foundations are doing.** Take a look at [www.youtube.com/user/TCFNcommunity](http://www.youtube.com/user/TCFNcommunity) for the video version of an online webinar about social media and the lessons that three foundations have learned and shared.
- **Determine the extent to which your organisation can be involved.** Maintaining social media tools and platforms requires human time and talent, and in some cases money. Free tools such as Twitter and blogs (hosted by WordPress or Blogspot) are relatively easy to manage. But more in-depth social media portals and services require more resources to create and support.
- **Start small.** You don't need to be active with every social media tool. Start with the one that makes the most sense for your strategy/needs and grow it from there. A great ongoing resource for non-profits is Beth Kanter's blog ([www.bethkanter.org](http://www.bethkanter.org)). Beth specialises in smart social media for non-profits.
- **Communicate expectations** to the staff, board, and volunteers about using social media on the foundation's behalf. Having a common and similar message and tone throughout your foundation's social media interface is a valuable communications strategy. Take a look at the "Social Media and Your Foundation" page on the TCFN website ([www.tcfncfc.ca](http://www.tcfncfc.ca)) for the Community Foundation of Ireland's Social Media policy, which lists 11 standards of social media participation.
- **Collect useful information.** In addition to sending information and news out, you'll want to use social networking portals to ask for feedback, input, and suggestions from those who you are connected to through social media.
- **Determine your progress.** Measuring your social media presence can help you better direct your efforts to strengthen their usage. For example, tracking statistics of visitors, followers, and friends on a weekly basis reflects how many viewers have access to the materials that you are sharing.

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