

SOCIAL MEDIA TIPS

How to create a social media following

Adapted in part from the Public Affairs Council

Be visual.

- Visuals increase the likelihood of a post being seen and shared.
- Share pictures of you and your affiliate.
- Share NAMI or NAMI Tennessee's infographics.
- Share memes, quotes, or inspirational pictures.

Be retweetable.

- Retweet posts from your legislator's office or state agencies such as the Tennessee Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services.
- Reply and comment thoughtfully on what they're sharing. Public officials appreciate seeing amplification of the content they generate.
- Keep your tweets short. Your goal is to get others — including the legislator — to respond, retweet or otherwise leverage your comments.
- Keep your tweets shorter than the maximum 140-character limit so that your legislator has room to reply, comment and include their handle. 100 characters is a good baseline.

Be a positive contributor.

- Negativity rarely enhances your online influence.
- Recognize and share contributions, thoughts and posts by others.
- Say "thank you."
- Write like you talk and be both funny and serious when the time is appropriate. Show your personality so that readers — including legislators — feel like they're talking to a real person and not a press release.

Establish your constituency.

- Just as it matters when you write a letter or send an email, legislative offices will take the most notice of constituents who consistently and thoughtfully engage via social media and who have a demonstrated influence and reach of their own.
- Remember that a legislator wants to engage with those who have the opportunity and following to positively influence the way that other constituents view their efforts.

- Follow other people and organizations with an interest in mental health and repost their posts.
- Retweet posts from other mental health groups including NAMI Tennessee to show our collective power as one organization.

Build your influence around relevant issues.

- This helps the legislator's office see that you are a thoughtful and engaged constituent.
- Demonstrate your knowledge and credibility over time on a given issue. Share details about your background and experiences that reinforce your expertise.
- Connect that expertise to the issues at hand (legislation, news articles).
- Build an audience of followers who care about the same issues.
- Share news articles that support your position and explain why; also post articles that highlight shortcomings and point out we still have more work to do.

Avoid politics.

- Avoid talking about elections, candidates and races.
- Focus instead on the issues – mental health is bipartisan!

Remember your audience.

- Remember that once you post something, it lives online eternally.
- As a thought leader, people will be watching what you post. Remember that you can influence people with your words.
- Never curse.
- Be respectful.
- Write every post and message with the understanding that the elected official and the general public can see it and respond.

Tips for posting after a legislative meeting

Here are some tips and ideas to make good use of social media when visiting or meeting online with elected officials (Adopted from the American Psychological Association of Graduate Students)

Know the username of the elected official with whom you are meeting.

Most leaders have Twitter accounts or Facebook pages. You can find it on the official's website or through a quick Google search. Use that username in your Twitter message. This is proper Twitter etiquette, and also gives the account holder a notice that he or she has been mentioned in someone else's tweet.

For example, "Had a great meeting today with @SenSmith and staff. He supports more mental health funding!"

Get permission first.

Check in with the official's office before you take pictures and post a message about your visit. It's good etiquette and relationship-building to let staff know that you may use social media to share highlights of the visit. It also gives that office advanced notice, and they can look for your posts in case they want to share or retweet on their own sites.

Ask before you share a photo of an official or staffers.

Each leader's office has its own policy for social media use. Some like to retweet/repost and share photos and messages from their constituents. Others prefer to only push out headlines or key messages and not retweet messages from visitors.

Take time to look at the office's Twitter page before your visits and get a feel for how the office uses social media. While elected officials typically aren't camera-shy, staffers generally aren't used to having photos taken, let alone shared on social media sites.

However, sharing photos of you and your colleagues outside the office or in front of the building is a great way to highlight your visit and your work.

You can post photos to Twitter or Facebook to increase engagement. Research has shown that Tweets with photos get 18 percent more clicks, 89 percent more favorited, and 150 percent more retweets!

Keep your Tweets positive or neutral.

This is important, even if you don't share the same political view or agenda as the elected official that you visit. If the visits weren't particularly positive, here are ways you can still share the work you did:

- Express gratitude for the person's time;
- Share that you personally lobbied them on a particular issue;
- Acknowledge that more work needs to be done in your state.

Example: "So glad to meet with @RepWilson on making TennCare available to more people. We're committed to making sure Tennesseans have access to health and mental health care."

Tweets should be about policy, not political. The rule you learned as a child should always apply, "If you don't have anything nice to say, don't say anything at all"

Use the best hashtag.

Twitter and other social media are filled with conversations. The power of online interaction comes from being part of those conversations and amplifying your message and the message of others.

Be sure to include the hashtag (#) your industry, campaign, the legislator or others use to talk about your issue, for example #namitn or #nami.

If you are involved in an advocacy campaign like #Vote4MentalHealth, use the commonly accepted hashtag for that campaign in all the messages you post about your legislative visits, so that others interested in this issue can easily search and follow related tweets.

For example, #HCR is the hashtag about health care reform; #ChangeMentalHealth is part of a campaign to reduce stigmas and barriers to accessing care.

- #namitn
- #vote4mentalhealth
- #mymentalhealth
- #NotAlone
- #MentalHealthforAll

NAMI guidelines

NAMI State Organizations and Affiliates are encouraged to embrace social media platforms to engage their communities online. Below are some tips for using the three main channels: Twitter, Facebook and Instagram.

Twitter: Twitter is a platform best suited to breaking news updates, policy and advocacy updates, creative posts about mental health awareness, and facts and statistics.

- **Formatting:** Hashtags should either be integrated into the text of the tweet, or after the text but before the link.
- If there are two links, the link you want embedded should be shared second in the tweet when posting or scheduling.

Facebook: Facebook is a great way to share major updates and items people can share with their friends and get them excited about mental health.

- **Formatting:** On Facebook, avoid using hashtags unless they refer directly to a NAMI campaign or are describing a cultural phenomenon that is referred to in the common vernacular as the hashtag (i.e., #YesAllWomen, #MeToo).

Instagram: This is a great place to share inspirational, lighter art or images about mental health.

- **Formatting:** Similar to Twitter in terms of hashtag use. No links should be shared in Instagram copy, unless they are easy to remember (i.e., nami.org/whycare). Any longer or harder to remember links to share should be done by changing the featured link in your Instagram bio.

Remember, when you post on social media about mental health and mention NAMI, your words reflect upon the entire NAMI organization.