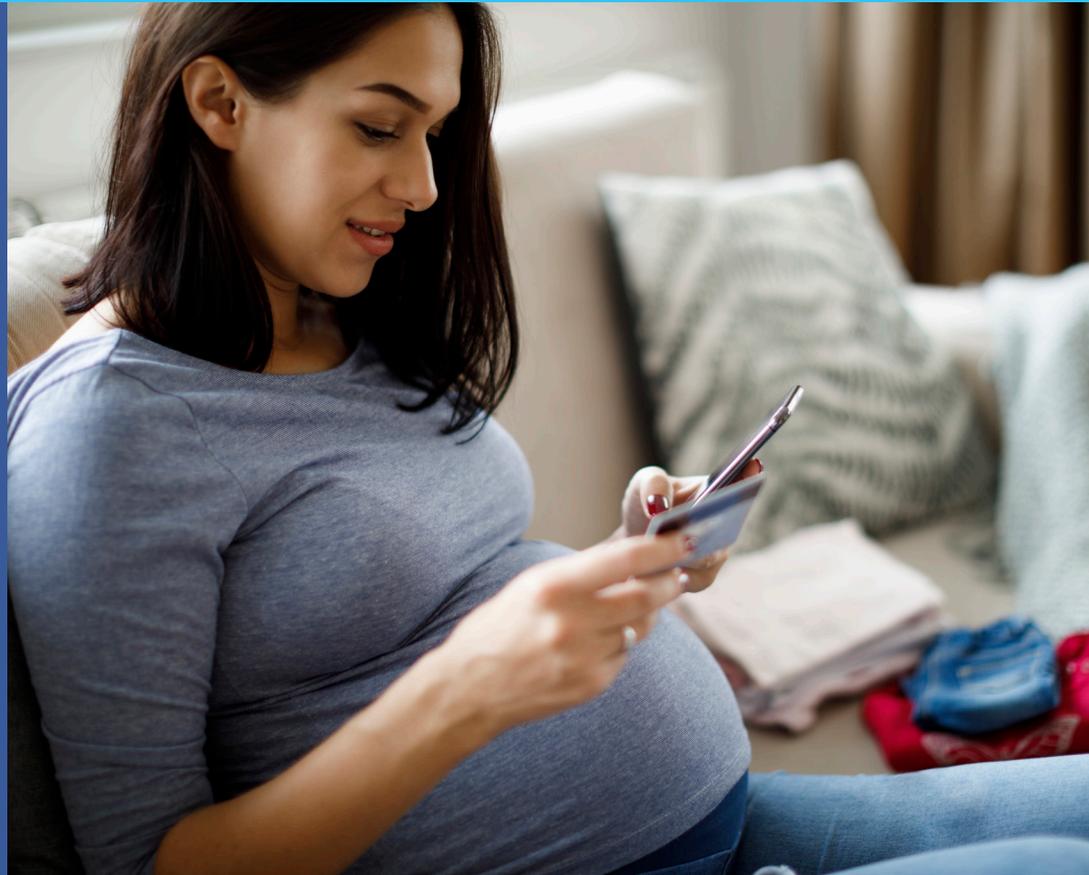


Foundations for Quality Series

Consumer Engagement



Six Tips for Engaging Families Through Social Media



NATIONAL CENTER ON

Parent, Family and Community Engagement

Acknowledgments

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Consumer Engagement: Six Tips for Engaging Families Through Social Media



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This resource is for State, Territory, and Tribal administrators and their partners who are responsible for consumer education and engagement. It builds on information presented in the guide, **Consumer Engagement: Using Social Media to Engage Families**. We encourage you to use both the guide and this resource together. The guide covers considerations for social media planning, such as:

- Developing or enhancing policies and procedures
- Choosing the best sites and times to post
- Creating posts that are strengths-based and promote engagement

Both the guide and this resource are part of **Foundations for Quality: A Consumer Education and Engagement Series**. Find the guide and other resources in the series on the Child Care Technical Assistance (CCTA) website.



Six Tips for Engaging Families Through Social Media

1. Learn what families want to know more about. Then post content that will help them learn about that topic and aid them in decision-making.
2. Build brand awareness so that consumers seek, value, and trust your content.
3. Along with organic posts, consider investing in “boosted posts” and paid digital ads to bring more attention to your content.
4. Include a call to action in your agency’s organic posts and ads.
5. Complement your public feed (your posts and ads) with options to communicate through private channels, such as messaging apps.
6. Make your agency’s social media policies available online so that staff can quickly access them when needed.

Did You Know?

Many government agencies use social media as a tool to engage with consumers. In a 2018 survey of agencies using social media, 90 percent of respondents (from state and local governments) reported engagement as their top priority for using social media. Many agencies reported using social media to provide consumer education. They also use social media to share critical and emergency response communications (GovLoop & Hootsuite, 2018).

Nonprofits also use social media. In a 2013 survey, 98 percent of nonprofits reported using social media to build relationships in support of their missions. Most linked their social media to their home page or website. Eighty percent developed their own social media content, and many included videos in their efforts (Center for Marketing Research, 2013).

Almost all government agencies report room for improvement in their social media efforts. Yet many report having no clear plan for moving forward with a social media strategy (GovLoop & Hootsuite, 2018). Meanwhile, nonprofits, especially larger organizations, are often savvy users of social media with sophisticated social media plans (Center for Marketing Research at University of Massachusetts, 2013).

Along with the successful strategies you may already have in place, use the following tips to enhance your agency's approach to engaging families through social media.

Six Tips for Engaging Families Through Social Media

1. Learn what families want to know more about. Then post content that will help them learn about that topic and aid them in decision-making.

According to one large national survey, what consumers want most from the social media posts of businesses and government agencies is content that will help them learn more about a brand or topic and aid them in decision-making. They also want posts that are engaging. In general, they want consumer education and links to more information (Sprout Social, 2018).

When viewing posts from government agencies, consumers prefer (in rank order) news, educational content, and updates. From nonprofits, consumers' top three preferences (in order) are inspirational content, educational content, and news (Sprout Social, 2018).

The first step is to find out what families want to know more about. In addition to posts about "hot topics," use consumer engagement strategies such as surveys, focus groups, and interactive online features to learn about the preferences of your audience. When possible, ask parents or family members to serve as a test group for the content you want to post. Then get their feedback on your content before you post it.

The second step is to tailor your content to the families you want to reach. Invite and respect the full diversity of their values, opinions, beliefs, and cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

Within any group of people, individuals have unique interests and opinions. In general, data indicate that Gen Xers (people born between 1965 and 1980) want news-related posts. Millennials (people born between 1981 and 1996, the age group when women are most likely to have their first child) prefer posts that are inspirational, educational, and entertaining (Sprout Social, 2018).

Gen Z (people between 1996 and 2010) prefers personalized experiences. They are more likely to view “Stories” than news feed. (Stories are posts that appear for only a short period of time and not as part of their news feed). Instagram is their primary source for news (Business Insider, 2019).

We use the terms “family” and “consumer” interchangeably in this resource.

Family refers to all adults who interact with early childhood programs and systems in support of the children in their care. This would include biological, adoptive, foster and step-parents, grandparents and other caregiving kin, and legal and informal guardians. This could also include parents who do not live with the child. When practicing relationship-based family engagement, professionals should keep in mind that families may also include siblings, cousins, and other family members living in the household.

Consumer comes from language in the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) of 2014 and the 2016 Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) Final Rule. Most often, the term refers to families who are seeking information about early childhood or school-age care and education for their children.

2. Build brand awareness so that consumers seek, value, and trust your content.

Consumers often learn about and develop associations with brands through social media (Sprout Social, 2018). Brand awareness indicates that consumers both recognize your brand and have expectations for the quality of the experiences they will have with your agency or products. For States, Territories, Tribes, and their partners, examples of “products” include consumer education information, programs, or services.

Effective branding and consumer engagement practices can promote interest, value, and trust in your content. These practices can also help create positive expectations among consumers for the experiences they will have with your agency, programs, and services.

Use consistent logos, colors, and fonts so that consumers can immediately recognize your content.

Consumers like graphics, images, and videos (Sprout Social, 2018). Consider ways to incorporate these elements into your posts. Use graphics, images, and videos that go well with other elements of your brand, have a similar tone and voice, and create a positive image.

Post regularly. A consistent presence will help build awareness. Find tips for choosing days and times to post in the guide, **Consumer Engagement: Using Social Media to Engage Families.**

Create and implement policies and procedures for responding to families’ questions and comments. Find policy considerations and tips for engaging with families after you post in **Consumer Engagement: Using Social Media to Engage Families.**

3. Along with organic posts, consider investing in “boosted posts” and paid digital ads to bring more attention to your content.

“Organic posts” refers to content that you post without paying for distribution. Boosted posts and ads refer to content that you pay to have distributed so that more people will see it.

Organic posts are a cost-effective way to have a consistent presence on social media. People who follow your page may go there for updates or to ask questions.

Depending on the platform you’re using, organic content from a business page can be difficult for people to find. Organic posts from business pages often do not appear at the top of a user’s feed.

Consider your goals and potential return on investment. If one of your goals is to increase engagement, boosting a post or an ad can be helpful because it increases the size of your audience. If you are promoting something that is time sensitive, such as an event or an enrollment period, and you want as many people as possible to see your content before the deadline, boosted posts and ads can expand your outreach. You can measure the return on your investment by counting the number of “Likes,” “Shares,” and “Comments.”

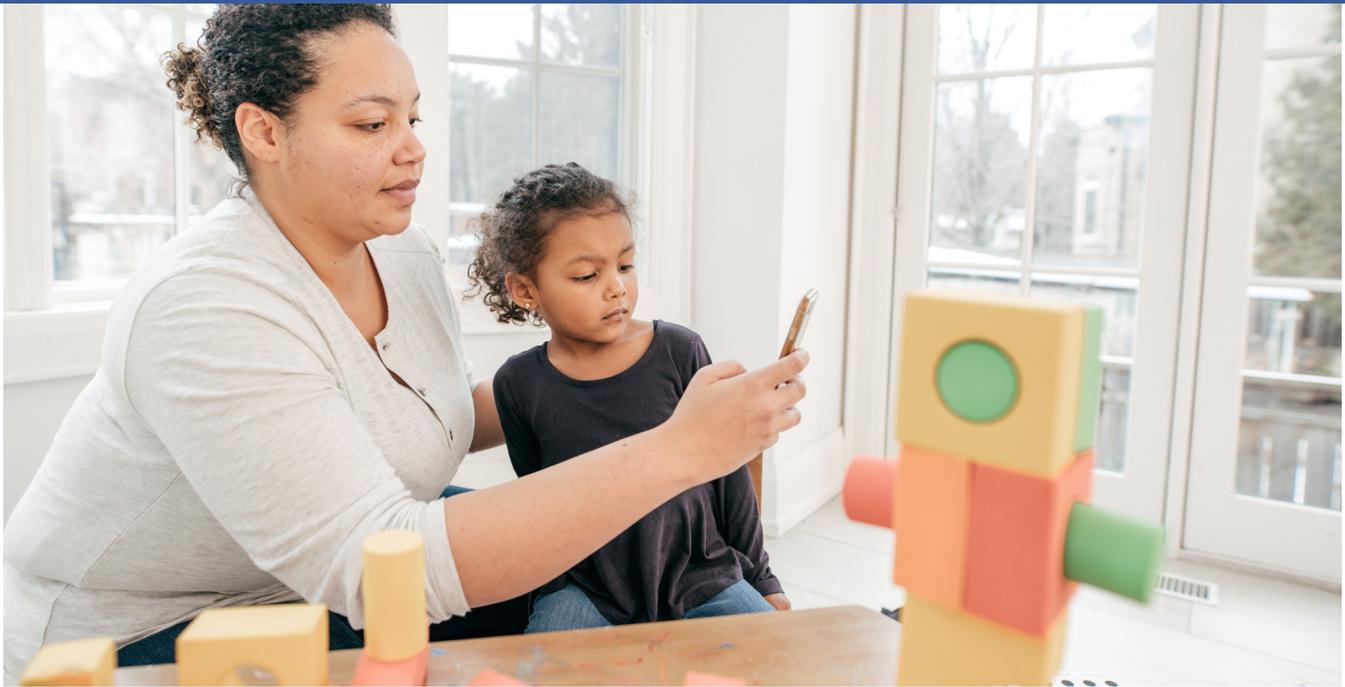
Explore your options. Formatting options vary based on the platform you are using. Options for customizing who will see your content also vary based on the platform. You can find helpful guidance by searching online (e.g., search “options for paid advertising on social media”) or by reviewing the how-to information provided by the platform you are using. Consider running test ads before investing in a large campaign.

4. Include a call to action in your agency’s organic posts and ads.

Consumer engagement is about two-way interactions between consumers and staff. One simple way to encourage engagement is to include a call to action in your posts and ads. A call to action is a simple (yet effective and often underused) instruction that encourages people to take action after they’ve viewed your post.

Create calls to action that align with your agency’s goals. Options for call-to-action features vary by platform and type of post. Some include an option to add a call-to-action button to a post or ad. In videos, options for a call to action include writing it into the script, showing it on a screen, or using platform-specific features.

| Sample Goals | Sample Calls to Action |
|---|---|
| Agency goals | |
| Enhance awareness. | Learn more. Find out if you’re eligible. Check out what’s available in your area. |
| Grow your e-newsletter subscribers. | Subscribe. Subscribe to our e-newsletter. |
| Encourage people to register or enroll. | Sign up. Register. Apply now. |
| Invite feedback. | Comment. Let us know what you think. |
| Goals related to consumer engagement outcomes (families as decision-makers, resourceful consumers, trusted peers, and leaders and advocates) | |
| Assist in decision-making. | Learn more. Contact us. Speak with a specialist. |
| Support resourceful use of services. | See ratings. Find tips. Submit a question. |
| Encourage sharing with family and friends. | Share with friends. Share now. Tag a friend. |
| Promote leadership and advocacy. | Get started. Connect with other parents. Join us. |



5. Complement your public feed (your posts and ads) with options to communicate through private channels, such as messaging apps.

Many consumers now prefer to communicate through private messaging apps, especially younger consumers. Recent data indicate that consumers rely on their news feeds to learn about brands and services. But they are more likely to share and interact through private channels (GlobalWebIndex, 2019).

Consider creating seamless connections between your posts, ads, and private channels. For example, include a “Connect with us” or “Talk to a specialist” call to action. Define parameters for engaging with individuals in private channels. Make sure staff are prepared to respond to consumers’ interests and questions.

Provide opportunities for consumers to interact with a real person. Bots or chatbots (software programs) may be used to respond to basic questions. However, consumers report feeling angry or frustrated when an automated response is their only option (Invoca, 2019). Consumers value the opportunity to connect with staff who can respond to more complex questions and situations. If you are able to provide a person-to-person response, let consumers know that you value their time and interest. And try to avoid situations that require consumers to explain their issue or ask their question repeatedly.

6. Make your agency’s social media policies available online so that staff can quickly access them when needed.

Whether you’re using organic posts, boosted posts, or ads, staff will be interacting with families. It’s important to have policies and procedures in place so that staff understand and can quickly access them when they need them. Staff may need to reference the policies after hours or while they are away from the office.

Google Drive, SharePoint, and intranet sites are examples of private (restricted-access) places to post your policies. Internal platforms (e.g., Microsoft Teams) and shared drives that are accessible online are other examples. Choose and use a location that meets your agency’s guidelines.

Find more information about policies in **Consumer Engagement: Using Social Media to Engage Families.**

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