

AMPLIFYING YOUR VOICE: LEVERAGING SOCIAL MEDIA

Today, social media can shift the national debate or a local campaign in a matter of minutes, let alone hours, making it more important than ever for essential hospitals to take advantage of these tools to advance their policy agenda. It is not surprising that social media has, therefore, become an indispensable tool for members of Congress, candidates, and political campaigns.

In the same vein, essential hospitals can leverage social media to enhance and amplify their outreach efforts with candidates and legislators. In particular, social media can be an important vehicle to learn about candidates, influence candidates, and engage stakeholder networks.

Social media is a powerful tool enabling you to impact the dialogue on health care and other related issues, while reinforcing the hospital's image and importance in the eyes of policymakers and campaigns. A strong digital presence can help energize your network and amplify a message. Hospitals must be careful not to post anything that could be construed as favoring or opposing a particular candidate, yet they can pass along information on candidate statements, issue positions, and campaign appearances.

The opportunities are vast. But given limited resources, the following are three effective ways to use social media to enhance your election outreach. If you are interested in more advanced activities, please contact Maya Linson at mlinson@essentialhospitals.org.

1. Listen: Follow candidates on social media

Candidates and incumbents are on Twitter, Facebook, and other social media platforms. Hospitals can use these tools as effective ways to learn and monitor what candidates are saying about health care. Here are a few simple tools to use:

- **Follow candidates on Twitter.** This may be one of the most important ways to learn about your candidates—and what is important to them. Also, if you follow them, they may follow your hospital, giving you another opportunity to influence them.
- **Visit the campaign websites for the congressional candidates running in your state or district and neighboring districts.** All will post some information about their position on health care and give you an idea of where they stand on the Affordable Care Act, Medicaid expansion, and other key issues of concern.

Note: Members of Congress often employ different Twitter, Facebook, and website account for their campaigns. You can often find the campaign Twitter account by visiting the congressional campaign website and following the social media icons.

2. Talk: Use social media to engage candidates

Ideally, your hospital will engage directly with candidates through social media to influence their actions and policy views. There are numerous ways to accomplish this, but here are a few that have the best chance of success and impact:

- By following candidates on Twitter, encourage candidates to follow your hospital

and leadership on Twitter. While the candidate might not follow an unknown individual, they likely will follow the institution, CEO, board chair and government relations director.

- Post hospital-relevant content on your platforms (e.g., articles, speeches, facts, success stories) that will resonate with candidates to influence their thoughts on issues. When posting, be sure to use hashtags associated with key issues, such as #Medicaid, to increase your visibility.
- Retweet and share any relevant statements that a candidate says about your issue, being careful not to include statements of support or opposition.
- Post candidate statements on issues relevant to your facility, being sure to treat all candidates equally and not selecting certain candidates' statements over others. Tweet at the candidate's Twitter handle when you post to keep them engaged.

3. Engage: Use social media to engage your network

Last, but certainly not least, use your social media platform to engage your hospital stakeholders. Social media is a tremendous tool to educate your network about the candidates and the issues. Here are a few additional ideas for the election season:

- Provide a list of candidate questions for your followers to ask candidates at town hall meetings or other campaign appearances. Place the list on your website or Facebook page.
- Tweet one question per week for the next 10 weeks. Encourage your followers to follow the candidates.
- Write a blog about how to be an informed voter. Topics could include the top five questions to ask a candidate on health care or a review of candidates' positions if you have an open congressional race.
- Create an online voter guide on your website and other social media platforms with unbiased profiles of the congressional candidates running in your district and those surrounding your hospital. You may link to candidates' websites if you present links to all candidates for the same office and do so in a neutral manner.
- Identify upcoming candidate events that are open to the public so your followers can attend and engage the candidates.
- Remind your network to vote.

Before embarking on the use of social media in the context of a campaign, be sure to consult with hospital legal counsel to be certain you are complying with all applicable federal and state laws.

2014 ELECTION ADVOCACY TOOLKIT

*Making Your Voice Heard for
Essential Hospitals and Patients*



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America's Essential Hospitals
1301 Pennsylvania Ave. NW, Suite 950
Washington, DC 20004
202-585-0100
info@essentialhospitals.org
www.essentialhospitals.org