



Learn and Serve America
CBO Social Media Learning Network - 2008-2009

Frequently Asked Questions

Frequently Asked Questions of CBO social media grantees

Over the course of the year, we presented at several conference and where often asked the following questions. In an attempt to provide a range of perspectives based on the different experiences of learning network members, the questions are listed below with various grantees offering their advice and insight.

1. *How long does start-up take?*

“Creating social networking sites from existing sites, such as Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, etc., takes about two to three months to get going. There are initial followers and posters, but it takes personal encouragement to get a lot of posts. And it takes a lot of prompting. A new site—such as a private, closed networking site built from scratch—takes at least six months of planning and preparation, and then two to three months to populate” (DD Gass, Camp Fire).

“It probably took us three months of making the case for social media and for dealing with firewall issues. Once we could make clear case for why blogs, Facebook, and videos were useful to us, things started to roll” (Angelia Salas, Michigan Commission).

“Start-up (i.e., development and testing of the interactive web site) was a minimum two-year process. This includes all phases of research, development, and test trials” (Gayle Brock, YMCA of the USA).

“AHEC got a basic closed social network up very quickly—it took two to three months. Once the site was open to YHSC members, we continued to upgrade the site with new features—this upgrading is still happening today. With each upgrade comes a host of bugs, and tweaks that need to be made. The YHSC members were living through this. It might be better to build the entire site, beta test, and then release. However, this did not seem realistic for NWCTAHEC” (Tricia Harrity, Northwestern CT AHEC).

“Usually, within a week you can get up and started on a social media site” (Erica Ricker, Heartland Foundation).

2. *How much staff and ongoing investment is required?*

“If we could afford it, we would have a staff person spend 20 hours a week on our social networking sites. The more time spent, the more interest. However, we currently have someone who spends 5-10 hours per week” (DD Gass, Camp Fire).

“It requires only the right team willing to fight for approvals. The social media efforts originated with program staff and VISTAs. The communication team soon adopted the practices and built them into their daily work plan. Currently, three cross-departmental team members (of 20) take the lead in this area” (Angelia Salas, Michigan Commission).

“At least one staff leader with IT support is required to monitor the site and respond to inquiries and facilitate staff communication” (Gayle Brock, YMCA of the USA).

“I have one full-time staff person who is responsible for the social network. He spends approximately .5 FTE on social networking tasks. He focuses on training and support of users as well as monitoring bugs in the system. He spends time distinguishing between operator error and system bugs. He trains AHEC staff, who in turn are responsible for training YHSC members. This system breaks down when the AHEC staff person is not confident in their social networking skills. We have created training tools for AHEC staff to use with YHSC members to orient them to the social networking features of our website, but still, if the AHEC staff does not have strong motivation to use the social networking features, this trickles down to the students” (Tricia Harrity, Northwestern CT AHEC).

“There only needs to be one person doing regular posting, but it’s beneficial to have occasional staff participation. This could mean a short blog about something they were involved with at the organization, or a personal story, pictures they took at an event, and so on. It’s good to give the organization a face and show the customer not only the work you’re doing, but *who* is doing the work. It helps connect.” (Erica Ricker, Heartland).

“It’s also important that staff supports the main social media person: keeping them aware of the goings-on, providing them feedback, commenting on blogs, Facebook, retweeting (basically getting a conversation started in hopes that others will join in), and just generally providing them the information that needs to get broadcasted” (Erica Ricker, Heartland).

3. *How do we get students to respond? How do we get students motivated to use a site or specific tools?*

“We can't assume that if you create an online community youth will be repeatedly drawn to it. The online community cannot replace the face-to-face community. Students need to be connected first before they are introduced to an online community. After that, they need to be pulled together regularly to maintain their connections” (Angelia Salas, Michigan Commission).

“The tool must be attractive, fun and developed by teens for teens (Gayle Brock, YMCA of the USA).

“YHSC has a ‘Gear Store’ that motivates students to use the social networking features. Students accumulate “gear points” for social networking activity. They can use the gear points to purchase YHSC gear, including T-shirts, drawstring bags, and hoodies. YHSC also integrates social networking activities into the service projects. We invite students to complete their reflections on their blog page. Students are required to make friends with other YHSC members. Student use polls to gather information. Students can celebrate success by posting pictures and videos about their service” (Tricia Harrity, Northwestern CT AHEC).

“Engaging students in creating meaningful blogs is best done by asking essential questions (see *Understanding by Design* by Wiggins and McTighe). This really engages them in reflecting about what is important in the learning activity or service experience” (Joy Ferguson, TASC).

4. ***How do we monitor inappropriate photos and language? Who monitors online postings and how often?***

“This has been a huge concern of our supervisors. We do have staff that monitor all of our social networking sites each day. Including weekends. But, it’s not 24/7. We have not had to delete very many posts. But some. Our closed social networking site for younger youth—the moderator has to approve all posts. This is a safeguard, but sure inhibits spontaneous conversations” (DD Gass, Camp Fire).

“This hasn’t been an issue yet. I hope that by clarifying the intent of the blog or video, students will want to present themselves well. They also know that teachers and other adults share their space. That seems to keep them in line. If not, we do have editorial control over most of these mediums. We would hate to have to use them” (Angelia Salas, Michigan Commission).

“Regional AHEC coordinators monitor their students’ social networking activity. We have not had any problems with this to date. We train students at the beginning of the program how to appropriately use social networking tools” (Tricia Harrity, Northwestern CT AHEC).

“We had a monitor check every evening to review for inappropriate comments. There were just a few that were better not published” (Joy Ferguson, TASC).

“We check Facebook, Twitter, and Launch Pad daily. It only takes a second to see who’s left a comment or who has responded to something. If something is inappropriate, it’s best to act quickly instead of waiting and doing it once a week. Usually you can adjust account settings to send an e-mail out when a new comment is received” (Erica Ricker, Heartland Foundation).

5. *Which social media tools do I select or start with when there seem to be so many options?*

“For adults and teens, we’ve had the best success with Facebook” (DD Gass, Camp Fire).

“We use Ning for lots of groups. Facebook, Blogspot, and Twitter are other tools that are easy for our folks to use” (Angelia Salas, Michigan Commission).

“It depends on what your goals are and who you’re trying to reach. Facebook is a broad tool. Pictures, blogs, and short announcements can be posted, as well as allow your customers to directly communicate with your organization. There aren’t a lot of elementary-aged students on Facebook, so if you’re trying to reach an older group, then it might be a good tool to use. (Younger students are just starting to use Facebook more, so maybe in the next few months it might be a more useful tool to reach them.)

“Based on my experience, Twitter seems like a good tool to use to communicate with other organizations and adults. Twitter isn’t something that a lot of younger students have started utilizing, but it has been gaining popularity with high school students. The most common age group for Twitter users is women in their mid-thirties.” (Erica Ricker, Heartland Foundation).

6. *What were one or two of the unanticipated impacts?*

“Our intention was to engage youth; the unanticipated impact was how excited adults were to share past Camp Fire experiences. And how proud alumni adults were to see stories of current youth programs.

“While some youth engaged in sharing stories and photos, they primarily wanted to share YouTube videos.

“Also, it has been *very* beneficial to have this agency sharing time! While we have learned from our council staff, and other agencies, we have learned a lot through listening to the processes others in the Web 2.0 grant have gone through to set up their programs. It has been very educational! It has helped us to better understand the barriers other organizations—and especially schools—face in using Web 2.0!” (DD Gass, Camp Fire).

“That the tool would be so well received that staff leaders would incorporate it into orientation trainings” (Gayle Brock, YMCA of the USA).

“Programs are now doing their own blogs. Staff are so much less intimidated by the safety issues of children on the web, which has opened the doors of social media as an arena for learning” (Joy Ferguson, TASC).

7. *What were one or two things you would never do again?*

“Youth want to share with other youth. So, the social networking sites where adults are primarily present were not as much interest to them. Sites specific to their programs were better populated” (DD Gass, Camp Fire).

“My biggest mistake in developing a social networking site had to do with me constantly building cumbersome safeguards against problems that never materialized. These cumbersome safeguards seemed prudent in the development stage. Web 2.0 is the Wild West of our society, and I wanted to make sure my network was something that was safe for students and acceptable to school systems and parents. However, these safeguards ended up serving as unnecessary barriers to student engagement. For example, I put in place two approval steps for students to log their volunteer hours on the website. I thought this made sense to protect against students logging on and ramping up their volunteer hours. What the approvals ended up doing is turning the students off from logging legitimate hours as well as getting active socially with other YHSC students” (Tricia Harranty, Northwestern CT AHEC).

“Omit incorporating a more comprehensive post-launch usage evaluation measure” (Gayle Brock, YMCA of the USA).

“Our web host changed just after our site was up, and this caused technical complications that were minor, but didn’t help us with our “best foot forward.” I would have delayed the start by one month, had I known.

“Our lead support people were so concerned with access (by far our biggest challenge) that quality became second tier. We should have scheduled another training halfway through to make sure that the key ingredient to engaging children in blogging was there: the essential questions (how, why, what will help, etc.)” (Joy Ferguson, TASC).