

## **National Guidelines for Social Media in EFNEP**

Developed by the EFNEP Southern Region Social Media Committee and Reviewed by the National EFNEP Office at NIFA/USDA\*

### **Background**

EFNEP is operating in the digital age and embracing the changing interests, learning styles, and resources of the low-income population. Social media offers an exciting opportunity to continue EFNEP's long tradition of peer-to-peer learning by providing a forum for two-way communication between EFNEP's target audience of low-income families, paraprofessional staff, and nutrition professionals. Contrary to popular belief, low-income Americans are using social media at similar rates as those of higher income levels (Duggan and Smith, 2013). To this end, EFNEP is dedicated to continuing to reach people where they are and where they are searching for nutrition and health information, online (Fox, 2011).

These guidelines have been developed to provide a framework for a cohesive and consistent voice for EFNEP on social media nationally. By operating within standard guidelines and best practices, EFNEP will build upon its history of providing high quality, effective nutrition education by incorporating the added strengths of digital technology.

Appropriate use of new technology and communication strategies allows EFNEP to make more efficient and effective use of public funds to bring about the greatest impact on the health and nutritional status of the most vulnerable people in our society. EFNEP will continue to be a leader by bringing a credible, relatable voice to the clamor of misinformation and cost-prohibitive advice from nutrition and health pages that our target audience currently finds online. Also, establishing guidelines for the appropriate use of social media in EFNEP will help reduce the potential for misuse and abuse of social media in the program. Having a standard of practice, as well as guidelines for preventative measures, will help shield state programs from the potential negative outcomes that are possible on social media, and will enhance recruitment, engagement, and continued support of positive health behaviors with our target population.

As state EFNEP Coordinators, you can incorporate social media into your programming efforts to help enhance face-to-face interactions with EFNEP participants. Below are important components you should consider when establishing a social media presence in your program.

### **Set Goals for Using Social Media in EFNEP**

The goals for using social media may be narrow or broad, but should result in continued engagement of participants following program graduation, improved retention, and/or

increased recruitment. **Social media should supplement, NOT replace, face-to-face interactions with participants.** (See The Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program Policies document, pages 4-5, Section IV- Purpose and pages 6-7 Section IV- Content and Delivery.)

As an example, a social media goal might be to show gradual change in participants' behavior over time. This may be accomplished by using social media to enhance the dialogue that occurs in face-to-face settings, offer additional encouragement of behavior change in accordance with EFNEP's programmatic goals, and/or collect program successes following program completion.

Another goal is to build community to encourage conversation. For example, social media could be used to encourage two-way communication between participants and universities around EFNEP subject matter. This could lead to universities and participants learning more from each other, identifying barriers/challenges and opportunities for meeting healthy eating and physical activity goals, and developing program strategies to address such barriers or take advantage of emerging opportunities. Through the use of social media, participants could also offer encouragement to each other to make healthy changes.

A third goal should be to inform and engage stakeholders. This is an opportunity for stakeholders to see the impact of the program directly from the participant. It is also an opportunity to identify champions of the program and to strengthen partnerships within the community.

There is a growing body of evidence which suggests that social media is an effective medium for recruiting audiences that are eligible for EFNEP participation. Using social media as an additional recruitment tool will help EFNEP potentially reach a different segment of the target population than traditional methods (Lohse, 2013). Additionally, EFNEP's presence on social media introduces EFNEP to the extended social network of current participants, the digital age version of word-of-mouth advertising, which promises to be useful for EFNEP recruitment.

### **Determine a Strategy for EFNEP Social Media Efforts**

#### *Plan for Success*

After determining your social media goals, it is important to establish a plan to accomplish those goals. Take into consideration the staff, training, time, and resources required. Be aware of any social media policies that your program operates within to avoid reinventing the wheel or creating a plan that is inconsistent with a parent policy, such as a university, state, or national program policy. However, your program may require more specific guidance than is provided in your parent organization's policy.

### *Consider Presence*

When developing your plan, determine the image that you will portray for your program(s). Establishing a presence on social media is a way to publicize your program to your target audience and to a broader audience of participant family members, the general public, and program stakeholders. You may choose to engage with different audiences through different social media accounts. Every decision made about your social media program should reflect the needs of your desired audience for each medium. Considerations may include voice, dialect, tone, reading level, engagement, motivation, call to action, visuals, and length.

Check with your funder and parent organization for guidance on program funding statements and branding considerations. Decide how you will name your social media account, the information that you will include in the account description (“About” section), and the degree of consistency that you wish to maintain among your various social media accounts. Also consider how to reflect consistency in purpose across states, **given that EFNEP is a national program**. Clearly define EFNEP in the “About” section as part of EFNEP nationally as well as the Land-Grant University Cooperative Extension System.

### *Set Limits*

Social media can easily monopolize your time. As part of your plan, **establish clear expectations and time commitments** for each staff member involved in the administration of social media. Additionally, institute guidelines and consequences for the inappropriate use of social media.

### *Determine Roles and Responsibilities*

To ensure that social media is adequately managed, multiple staff should be involved in the creation and administration of all social media accounts. Roles can vary depending on the goals and purpose of your social media plan. Examples include content creation, review, posting, and oversight, technology support, and evaluation. At least two staff members should have the log-on information for each account. By involving multiple staff, you can develop safeguards that alleviate concerns around security, consistency, and workload.

Consider the qualifications needed for staff members who will have a role in your social media plan. This will help you determine the degree of training and oversight required. Administrators should remain up-to-date on changes to social media and best practices for effectively engaging the EFNEP target audience. Additionally, administrators should assure that all EFNEP staff who utilize the social media strategy for their program are adequately trained.

### *Manage Content*

The content shared through your social media account(s) should uphold the same level of integrity as your overall program. Administrative oversight is needed to ensure that content shared on social media is research-based and unbiased. Additionally, measures should be made to flag information that will eventually change (i.e. references to the USDA food icon or Dietary Guidelines for Americans). Formulate a content review process to ensure that accurate, appropriate, and useful messages are used as part of your social media plan.

### *Maintain Social Media Accounts Regularly*

Consistency and timeliness in posting are crucial to establishing and maintaining a positive relationship with your followers, and to maximize your reach on social media. To enhance efficiency and maintain a consistent presence, develop a posting schedule that fits your social media plan and doesn't detract from administrators' other work obligations.

Social media should be monitored daily and configured in a way to notify account administrators -- by text message, email, etc. -- if a question or comment is made. Timely responses -- ideally within 24 hours -- are key to building a trusting relationship with your followers.

### *Review and Modify*

Evaluation is an important part of any intervention and should not be overlooked when establishing a social media plan. There is no standard of what kind of information to collect and track to prove the value of social media. It is important that your social media plan includes guidelines for capturing data and analytics to align with your reporting wants and needs. Multiple resources are available to guide evaluation efforts. You may find the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's HealthCommWorks site, <http://www.cdc.gov/healthcommworks/>, helpful in planning your evaluation.

## **Prevent Abuse and Misuse**

### *Protect the Security of Social Media Channels*

Social media should be managed by a minimum of two administrators for security purposes, at least one of whom should be professional level staff. Have a plan in place for the eventual transfer of administration duties due to employee turnover or staffing changes. Having two administrators can prevent a situation in which departing employees maintain control over your organization's social media account(s) after they leave. Without a second administrator and a transition plan, you would be left without access to your social media account(s), or worse, a disgruntled staff member could post inappropriately on your site with no avenue of recourse by your organization.

Put a plan in place for administrative transition. If an administrator leaves the organization, he/she should relinquish his/her administrator privileges and/or log-on information to his/her co-administrator. Administrator passwords for the social media account(s) should then be changed and a new co-administrator should be appointed.

Choose strong passwords for your social media account(s), which are continuously phished by spammers. If you notice that an account has been hacked, immediately change your password. This should prevent spammers from re-accessing your account. If this does not solve your spam issue, contact the social media site administrators directly for assistance.

In either case, alert your followers to the security breach, apologize for the inconvenience, and suggest that they change their passwords for preventative measures against spammers accessing their account(s), as well.

While there are always security risks in using social media sites, these tips will help reduce chances of your social media account getting hacked:

- Pick a strong password and don't share it
- Update your passwords regularly
- Add a security question to your account
- Take advantage of any extra security features provided by the social media site
- Review security tips for each social media site utilized by your program

### *Protect the Integrity of Social Media Channels*

Be prepared to handle adverse situations that may arise on social media, such as spam, incorrect information, negative personal comments, etc. Consider conferring with other administrators in your organization prior to responding. Healthy dialogue is encouraged to engage the participants; however, in some situations comments can become overly negative or even contain false information.

At times, it is better to ignore unwanted posts than to invite further escalation by responding. If you feel a response is necessary, as in the case of inaccurate information, post a polite rebuttal, with links to supporting information from reputable sources, such as government sources. If the commenter continues to respond negatively, ignore or hide the comments. If the posts become inflammatory, remove them from your site and block the commenter.

Having a written commenting policy, to which you can refer problematic commenters, is helpful. Include what is and is not allowable on your page, as well as the steps you will

take to address inappropriate behavior. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Facebook commenting policy is a simple and concise example: <http://www.cdc.gov/socialmedia/tools/commentpolicy.html>

### *Protect Privacy and Confidentiality*

Privacy and confidentiality are essential components of programs that work with limited-resource audiences. Be sure that your social media plan ensures the privacy and confidentiality of the individuals that EFNEP serves and that content contains no personally identifiable information. Your organization's plan should consider the appropriateness of posting participant photos, especially those of minors.

Consider the pros and cons for how best to truly engage EFNEP participants in sharing successes and problem-solving barriers within a publicly available social network. The goal for your social media presence will influence this decision. It is the responsibility of your social media administrators to stay current on the constantly evolving privacy settings and features on social media channels used by your organization and weigh the competing concerns for participant privacy and the greater visibility (and thus access) of fully public accounts as you determine your organization's strategy to protect participants' privacy and confidentiality.

### **Make Content EFNEP Specific**

#### *Share Content Appropriately*

Content created and shared on social media should be research-based and reflective of the core areas of EFNEP: namely, diet quality and physical activity, food resource management, household food safety, and food security.

As with any other content, **plagiarism is not acceptable**. Respect the copyrights of all content sources, including photos, and when possible, reference (usually through links or mentions) the original source.

#### *Write for EFNEP's Target Audience on Social Media*

All content should be appropriate for EFNEP's target audience. The Southern Region Social Media Committee developed an instrument for vetting social media posts that can be used as a resource when creating site content: <http://efnepsocialmedia.wordpress.com/2014/02/19/efnep-social-media-post-vetting-instrument/>. Organizations should take into consideration recommended reading levels for low-literacy audiences, use of visual aids to clarify concepts, provision of culturally- and linguistically-appropriate materials, etc. when creating content for social media.

Social media content should have a conversational, yet professional tone. Messages should be presented in active voice using positive language for optimal impact on followers' knowledge retention and behavior change. Additionally, social media

messages should provide behavior-oriented advice and not solely information. These strategies will help to increase the likelihood that social media can support improved dietary and physical activity choices among followers.

### **Acknowledgments**

These guidelines emerged from the work of the Southern Region Social Media Committee to provide an evidence-based framework for the successful adoption of social media programming by state EFNEP programs while staying true to EFNEP's long tradition of effective nutrition education. It is the hope of the committee that social media will enhance face-to-face programming, support sustained positive behavior changes, and aid in increasing recruitment to EFNEP.

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\*These guidelines have been reviewed and endorsed by Helen Chipman, National Program Leader, at NIFA/USDA. Given their contribution to EFNEP nationally, these guidelines have been posted on NIFA's EFNEP website – [www.nifa.usda.gov/EFNEP](http://www.nifa.usda.gov/EFNEP).

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