

FACEBOOK
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*Facebook 201 for
Child Welfare Professionals:*
**STRATEGIES AND BEST PRACTICES
FOR USING FACEBOOK**

.....
to Reach Foster, Adoptive, and Kinship Families



Adopt US Kids

Together we hold their future

GETTING READY

Initial Steps

Facebook: Personal Profiles vs. Organizational Pages

There are two distinct types of pages on Facebook – personal profiles and organizational pages. Personal profiles, which Facebook recently started referring to as “Timeline,” are ones created by individuals to interact with their family and friends. Organizational pages are created to represent businesses, agencies, organizations, or public figures such as celebrities and politicians.

If your agency is going to establish a presence on Facebook, you need to establish that presence as an organizational page, not a personal profile. Using a personal profile for an agency violates Facebook’s Terms of Service, and will likely result in your page getting deleted at some point.

Laying the Foundation

Once your agency makes the decision to create a Facebook page, you may need to coordinate with your information technology staff. This is particularly true if your agency’s employees are currently restricted from accessing social media sites on work computers, because you will need to get this restriction lifted for staff involved in managing your agency’s Facebook page.

Assign Staff

One of the first things you should do is identify which staff member will be responsible for posting content and responding to comments and questions on your agency’s Facebook page. This person should serve as the primary administrator for your agency’s page. Some key things to think about when making this decision include:

- Remember that this person will be communicating with the public in a public forum much like a spokesperson in a press conference does. Make sure the person speaking on behalf of your agency on Facebook is knowledgeable about your agency, including its policies and practices; can communicate clearly and effectively in writing; and is skilled at knowing when to handle comments and questions on their own versus seeking input from someone in a supervisory capacity.
- The person who serves as your agency’s Facebook page administrator should also have a strong understanding of how to respond to sensitive situations that may arise through posts people may leave on your agency’s Facebook page.
- Age has nothing to do with ability to manage social media well, so do not make the assumption that a young person is automatically the best person to handle social media for your agency.

Final Considerations

When your agency is ready to establish a Facebook page, you should think about two key considerations for actually creating the page:

- 1 The person who creates your agency’s page must have a personal Facebook profile already, since organizational Facebook pages can only be created by someone who is logged into a personal Facebook account. This person’s personal profile will not be linked to your agency’s page publicly, but the only way—under current Facebook requirements—to establish an organizational page is to have someone with a personal Facebook account create the page.

- 2 The person who creates your agency's page should be someone who will be an administrator of the page, at least initially, because the act of creating the agency's page will automatically give this person administrator status.

Once you have created your agency's page, you can assign additional people—each of whom must have a personal Facebook profile—as administrators for the page. Here are some suggested guidelines for assigning administrators to your agency's Facebook page:

- Your agency should have more than one person set up as an administrator.
- Your agency should assign as administrators anyone who will be posting and responding on behalf of the agency, and anyone directly supervising them.
- Your agency should have clear guidelines about who is posting content or responding to comments at any given time. For example, at AdoptUSKids, we have assigned a social media specialist to handle all posts and comments on our page. Additional administrators provide back-up when the primary administrator is out for vacation or sick days, or in case of emergencies. By having a clear plan for who has primary responsibility for managing your agency's Facebook content, and who will provide back-up support, your agency can avoid duplicating messages or missing responses to posts.

It is critical to remember to remove people as administrators for your agency's page when it is no longer appropriate for them to have administrator status (e.g., when they change positions, leave the agency, are no longer authorized to speak on behalf of the agency, etc.). Your agency should have a clear protocol in place to ensure the list of people who have administrator status for your Facebook page is current.

Have a Plan

Plan Your Content

In any given month, your agency likely plans to communicate with the public in multiple ways. These efforts might include emails to foster, adoptive, and kinship families; ads to run in local news publications; and much more. These communication efforts might also include events such as recruitment events and matching parties.

As you begin to plan how to implement social media communications within your agency, it is important to coordinate with your agency's communications staff—or program staff if they are responsible for distributing announcements to the public—to ensure that your agency's communication through Facebook aligns with broader communication plans and strategies.

Seek Your Agency's Guidance Before Implementing These Ideas

The guidelines in this document apply equally to both public child welfare staff and the staff of private agencies that provide services on behalf of the public agency.

Child welfare systems across the country are in varied stages of exploring and using social media. The ideas included in this document are general suggestions for ways to use social media in child welfare work and are intended for agency leaders and managers as they decide if and how social media can support their communication, outreach, and engagement efforts. As with all new approaches, you should consider how these suggestions might work within the context of your jurisdiction and your State's public child welfare agency's policies, guidelines, and best practices. The ideas and tips included here should not be used if they conflict with any policies of your State's public child welfare agency, regardless of whether your relationship with the agency is that of employee-employer or contractual, and should only be implemented with the support of the public agency's leadership.

Integrating your agency's Facebook presence with other communication efforts will have multiple benefits, including:

- Increasing the effectiveness of your messages by reinforcing them through multiple channels. For example, emails your agency sends will be more effective if they are supported and reinforced by posting similar content to your Facebook page at about the same time your agency sends out the email.
- Helping to ensure consistency in messaging across channels, by coordinating what your agency says through each communication channel. Your agency's emails, ads, and Facebook posts should contain the same critical information points, in order to increase your audiences' understanding of your messages.
- Maximizing attendance of public events by cross-promoting them using your agency's Facebook page.

In addition to coordinating your Facebook posts with your agency's other messaging and communications, you should also consider what other resources and information you want to share with both current and potential foster, adoptive, and kinship families, and any other major audiences that interact with your agency through your Facebook page. Keep in mind that not all of these resources need to be—or even should be—directly from your agency. You should seek to share anything you think will be useful and helpful to your audience on Facebook and is consistent with your own agency's message and goals.

Your agency will likely find it beneficial to plan out the majority of the content that you intend to post on Facebook in advance, probably a month at a time, leaving a little room for flexibility to respond to new situations or take advantage of new information as it becomes available.

Have a Response Plan

Some of the information that you post on your agency's Facebook page may prompt negative responses and reactions. Additionally, there will be times when people post their own messages on your agency's page that are either complaints or some other type of negative or highly sensitive comment. Your agency should be prepared for these occurrences and have a plan to deal with it.

Based on best practices for social media, AdoptUSKids recommends including or addressing the following elements in your agency's response plan:

- Do not delete the negative comment or post unless it uses profanity or is threatening to any person or organization. *Note: It is a good idea for your agency to have a Terms of Use policy for your Facebook page to help make your guidelines clear about what kinds of posts will be deleted. AdoptUSKids has a template for Terms of Use that you are free to use and modify as needed: http://adoptuskids.org/_assets/files/NRCRRFAP/resources/developing-a-terms-of-use-policy-for-your-agency-facebook-page.pdf*
- Have a clear protocol for how to decide which posts your agency will delete from your page, including which supervisor or team of Facebook page administrators will make the final decision about whether to delete a post.
- If a comment or complaint is at all legitimate, acknowledge it and determine how you might be able to address the issue in a constructive and positive way. Defensive positions are almost always met with backlash, especially in social media. Remember, the conversations on your Facebook page are not just between you and the person posting, but with every person who sees your agency's Facebook page.
- When possible, the person typically in charge of handling your agency's Facebook posts and responses should also be in charge of responding to negative comments and complaints. This person should either need to know the appropriate response or know who to ask when they need additional help.

Prepare the Staff

Once your agency decides to use Facebook, your agency leadership should communicate this decision with all agency staff and specifically address:

- Why your agency has decided to begin using Facebook
- What goals your agency plans to achieve through the use of Facebook
- Which staff will be responsible for managing the agency Facebook page
- Ways that other staff might be able to be involved, whether that's through providing suggestions for content or other ideas they might have for enhancing your agency's presence on Facebook

If your agency's staff is not allowed to access social media sites at work, you may need to be prepared to answer questions about whether or not this policy will be changing to give staff who aren't involved in managing your agency's Facebook page access to social media sites.

Creating Your Agency's Facebook Page

To create a Facebook page for your agency, go to <https://www.facebook.com/pages/create.php> and follow the guidelines there. As you do this, keep in mind the following tips:

- Pay attention to the guidelines provided by Facebook for image sizes for your profile image and the cover photo. These images are part of your agency's branding and should be of good quality, just as you would use on your agency's website.
- The cover photo can be almost anything, but take note of Facebook's policies regarding not using the cover photo for "advertising." Facebook prohibits promotional messages here, although a tagline or relevant statistic is probably fine as a way of raising awareness.
- Provide complete information in the "About" section for your agency's page. Include information about ways people can contact your agency, including your street address, website, and phone numbers.
- You can create a custom Web address for your Facebook page, which will make it easier to publicize than if you use the default Web address Facebook uses for pages. Default addresses start with *facebook.com* and are followed by the name given to a page and a string of numbers such as <http://www.facebook.com/your-agency-name/35716871548>.
- When you make a custom address for you page, you can make it align with other Web addresses for your organization, such as the one for your website. For example, the AdoptUSKids custom address for AdoptUSKids' Facebook page is www.facebook.com/adoptuskids, and it coordinates with the website address of <http://www.adoptuskids.org>. It's important to note that once you create your custom Web address, it is unlikely you will be able to change it in the future.
- You can find additional help on setting up your page directly from Facebook at: <https://www.facebook.com/help?page=255100294550008>



Figure 1. AdoptUSKids' cover photo includes our tagline, "Together we hold their future"

GETTING STARTED

Promoting Your Page

Promote Your Page Through Your Website

Once your agency has created its Facebook Page, you will likely want to promote it and get the word out so people can follow it (or “Like” it, as the terminology of Facebook currently calls it). In order to have your agency’s Facebook posts display in the “News Feed” of people’s personal Facebook page, people have to click the “Like” button when they go to your Facebook page.

One of the primary ways to inform people that your agency has a Facebook page is by linking to it from your agency’s website. The most common way to do this is to put links to your Facebook page on the homepage of your website, typically in top and bottom navigation. Making this addition to your agency’s website will likely require coordinating with your agency’s website administrators.

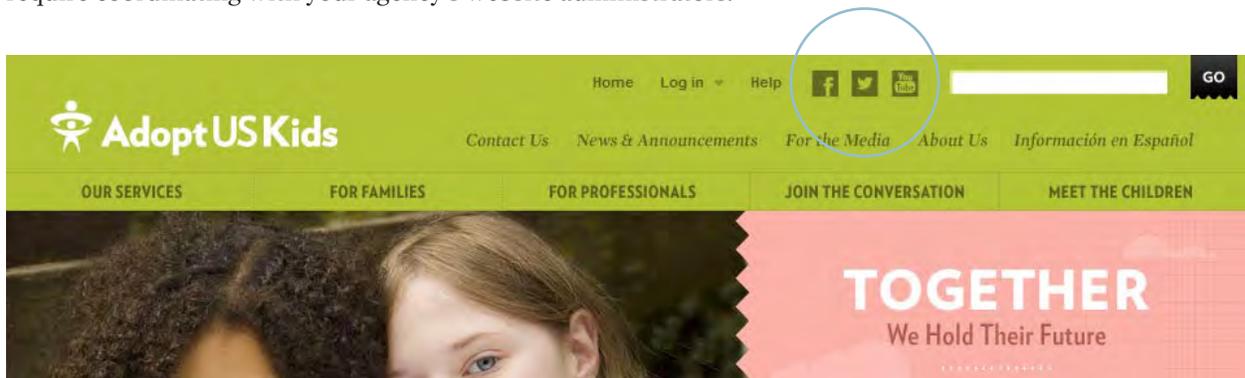


Figure 2. AdoptUSKids includes links to social media networks in the top right side of our website pages. They are also included with links in the footer on our website pages.

Promote Through Other Communications

Your agency probably already communicates with families, community partners, and the general public in a variety of ways. Many of these communication channels can be used to promote your agency’s Facebook page, especially if you created a custom Web address (see the previous section “Creating Your Agency’s Facebook Page”). Examples include:

- Email campaigns and newsletters—adding a link to your agency’s Facebook page in the email template you use for your email campaigns and newsletters is an easy way to promote your page on an ongoing basis
- Posters, banners, and other promotional materials created for special events
- Anywhere else where you list your agency’s website address and other contact information

Provide Consistently Good Content

One of the best ways to gain and keep followers for your agency’s Facebook page is to provide them with valuable information. If you regularly post good content that people want, actively engage with people who follow your page, and respond promptly to questions or complaints, these activities will go a long way toward growing and maintaining your Facebook page’s following.

MANAGING YOUR AGENCY'S PAGE – BEST PRACTICES

Communicating With Your Followers

Best Practices: What You Should Do

These tips are important reminders of what you should do when communicating with the followers of your agency's Facebook page:

- **Post regularly.** A Facebook page that only has content added to it every few months is not serving you or your audience very well. Social media is for you and the public to engage with each other, and part of that engagement requires making sure you're providing valuable content on a regular and somewhat frequent basis. How often is often enough? Opinions vary, but one to two posts per day is probably ideal. We do not recommend posting fewer than two to three times per week, nor should you post more than three to four times per day.
- **Respond promptly.** When people post comments, it's good to acknowledge those comments, and to do so in a timely manner. The acknowledgement could be as simple as clicking the "Like" button on their comment, or commenting in response. If someone posts a question or concern, it's even more important that your agency respond to it as quickly as possible. To that end, your agency should have someone monitoring the Facebook page for comments and questions regularly throughout the day during business hours.
- **Remember that communication on Facebook is public.** Always treat people with respect, kindness, and professionalism, just as your agency does in all other communications. Always be as honest as policies and best practices will allow. Everything you post on Facebook is public for the world to see, just as if you were on live TV.

HOW TO REQUEST TRAINING AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

We offer free training and technical assistance (T/TA) to public child welfare agencies to help you build your agency's capacity to use social media as part of your recruitment and retention efforts. You can access our T/TA services in any of the following ways:

- Connect with us online at adoptuskids.org/nrc-recruitment
- Contact your Administration for Children and Families (ACF) Regional Office staff to initiate a request for T/TA
- Contact us to discuss your needs by calling 303-726-0198



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