Facebook

Across the globe, more than 800 million people use Facebook. Approximately 150 million Facebook accounts come from the United States (CVP Marketing Group, 2011). By using Facebook, you are using something familiar to millions of people to raise awareness, document your civic actions, and create positive change in your community. And it’s free.

**Protect your privacy.** Always consult Facebook’s privacy policy before creating a profile or group page. You may want to keep your information available only to your fellow CAP students and teacher, but a group page would probably be most helpful to your project if it is public. Before creating any Facebook account, however, always discuss using Facebook with your parents or guardian. Consult Facebook’s Family Safety Center, and especially its Playing It Safe page for teens. Remember, whatever you post on Facebook is potentially visible to teachers, parents, and current and future employers.

**Decide how you want to use Facebook.** You can either use your personal Facebook page to subscribe to the news feed of organizations, electronic publications, and elected leaders in order to receive helpful information, or you can create a group page for your civic action project.

**Describe your civic action project.** Creating a group page is a civic action. It is a way to gather information related to your project and present it to your community and the world. In the “Info” section of your Facebook page, describe the issue or problem you are working on, the reason why it is important, and what the public policy connection is. You should also identify yourself and any other group members. Be clear in your description and use grammar, spelling, and punctuation correctly. That will ensure that people take your work seriously.

**Build a constituency for your issue with friends and others.** If you create a group page, invite your friends to join. In turn, they can invite more friends. Facebook can serve as your project’s web site. If you choose to allow the public to view and post on your group’s wall, you can potentially build a larger constituency for your issue. Be aware that you may also attract comments from people who disagree with your perspective. Fifteen percent of teens using social media say they have been the target of mean or cruel behavior on social networking sites (Pew Research Center, 2011). See Civic Action Project’s Anti-Bullying Project page for resources on how to define it and prevent cyberbullying.

**Post your civic actions.** Facebook is different from Twitter in that you are not limited to 140 characters. You can post as much as you want about your project. It is still a good idea to be succinct in your posts. (For example, if someone comments “tldr,” that means something is “too long, didn’t read.”) Facebook allows you to post photos, too, which can document the actions you take.

**Connect to elected leaders.** Most elected officials have a Facebook account. Find out who your representative is and click “Like” to follow their news feed. You can often learn a lot about public policy from the messages they post about new laws or newsworthy events. You can also send them messages voicing your concerns and opinions. Always use respectful language, especially since your posted comments will be public. By scrolling through your representative’s wall, you may also find fellow constituents who have the same concerns.
tumblr, Blogger, and Woodpress

Approximately 73 percent of active web users have read a blog, and 45 percent have started a blog (Trendspotting, 2008). Blogs can give you freedom in controlling the content and visibility of your civic action project. Creating a blog is easy, and there are several free services enabling you to do so, including tumblr, Blogger, and Woodpress. Blogs give you a chance to be creative in presenting your project. Remember, creating the blog itself is a civic action!

Blogging is publishing. Remember that when you post something on your blog, it becomes published material. That means you need to carefully review anything you want to post before publishing it. Make sure your information is accurate and supported by evidence and credible sources. Avoid publishing information that could be insulting or offensive to others.

Describe your civic action project. In the “About” section of your blog, describe the issue or problem you are working on, the reason why it is important, and what the public policy connection is. You should also identify yourself and any other group members. Be clear in your description and use grammar, spelling, and punctuation correctly. That will ensure that people take your work seriously.

Choose your authors. The content on your blog can be all yours, or you can invite guest bloggers to express their opinions. If your project is a group effort, decide if everyone should write for the blog, or if you want your group to have one spokesperson writing blog posts.

Connect with your constituency. You can write to ask your readers to e-mail their local representatives, check out your Facebook page, or attend a meeting. Write about your successes, but also about your struggles. It is probably a good idea to allow people to post comments. People like to visit blogs they can interact with, even if they disagree with the blog’s perspective. See Civic Action Project’s Anti-Bullying Project page for resources on how to define and prevent cyberbullying.

Share ideas, civic actions, and news. You can also share tips or ideas on how to address your issue or problem. Post photos, stories, or videos that display your civic actions. If you organize an event, ask attendees for their opinions about the event and then post it. This could persuade people to support your project. If you spot an article on the web that relates to your issue or to your project, post it on your site. When you post the link, describe how it relates to your project. People will return to your blog if it is an up-to-date source.

Always give proper attribution to any link (the author and web site where you found it).

Always get permission to publish information and interviews. A blog is a great place to publish an interview with a community leader or elected representative. If possible, post a photo of any interview session. Always be clear in explaining to interviewees that you plan to publish the information on your project’s blog. Give them the URL of the blog.
Twitter

There are over 300 million Twitter users worldwide. An increasing number of teens are using the site in the U.S., particularly because of its microblogging function (Pew Research Center, 2012). Microblogging means users share small bits of information quickly and easily with as few or as many people as they want. A post on Twitter is called a “Tweet,” and it is limited to 140 characters. Creating a Twitter account for your civic action project is itself a civic action.

Become familiar with Twitter’s unique language. Unlike Facebook or blogs, Twitter only allows you 140 characters to work with. Therefore, Tweets typically use abbreviations, sentence fragments, symbols, and hashtags (a word preceded by the “#” symbol). By using a hashtag (e.g., #littering, #citycouncil, or #civicaction), you can easily search for similar Tweets by others. When getting started on Twitter, consult the Twitter Basics page, which explains how to effectively post Tweets, use hashtags, post a Retweet (“RT”), and delete posts. It is a good idea to include a web link in a Tweet for more information, given the limited space you have.

Protect your privacy. Always consult Twitter’s privacy policy before creating a Twitter page. You may want to keep your Tweets available only to your fellow CAP students and teacher, but a page would probably be most helpful to your project if it is public.

Make good use of applications, or “apps.” Apps allow you to creatively share visual and other information within the 140-character limit. One example is Twitpic, a photo-sharing app that can allow you to share pictures that illustrate your issue, display your civic actions, and document events that you organize.

Build a constituency for your issue with “followers.” By clicking “Follow” on anyone’s Twitter page, you become their follower. In turn, others can become your followers. Ask your followers and everyone else who sees your Tweets to retweet your posts to their followers. When more people see your Tweets, you are raising awareness of your issue or project. Be aware that you may also attract comments from people who disagree with your perspective. Fifteen percent of teens using social media say they have been the target of mean or cruel behavior on social networking sites (Pew Research Center, 2011). See Civic Action Project’s Anti-Bullying Project page for resources on how to define it and prevent cyberbullying.

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