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STUDENTS

Using Social Media for Advocacy and Legislative Visits

Social media tools such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and blogs are powerful vehicles in promoting legislative advocacy to a large audience. Your use of the social media platforms with your messaging shows that psychology students have a large voice and are active participants in protecting and advancing the profession.

However, social media etiquette is important. Here are some tips and ideas to make good use of social media when visiting elected officials.

1. Keep your Tweets positive or neutral, even if you don't share the same political view or agenda as the elected official that you visit. If the visits weren't particularly positive for psychology, here are ways you can still share the work you did.

- Express gratitude for the person's time
- Share that you personally lobbied them on a particular issue
- Acknowledge that more work needs to be done in your state.

Tweets should be about policy, not political. The rule you learned as a child should always apply, "If you don't have anything nice to say, don't say anything at all."

2. Know the Twitter username of the elected official with whom you are meeting. Most leaders have Twitter accounts or Facebook pages. You can find it on the official's website or through a quick Google search. Use that username in your Twitter message. This is proper Twitter etiquette, and also gives the account holder a notice that he or she has been mentioned in someone else's tweet.



For example, "Had a great meeting today with @SenSmith and staff. He supports including psychologists in the Medicare physician definition!"

Or: “Joined colleagues this a.m. in meeting with @SenSmith's office to ask that he cosponsor S. 1064. I hope he does the right thing.”

3. Check in with the official's office before you Tweet a message about your visit. It's good etiquette and relationship-building to let staff know that you may use social media to share highlights of the visit. It also gives that office advanced notice, and they can look for your Tweets in case they want to share or retweet on their own sites.

4. Ask before you share a photo of an official or staffers. Each leader's office has its own policy for social media use. Some like to retweet and share photos and messages from their constituents. Others prefer to only push out headlines or key messages and not retweet messages from visitors. Take time to look at the office's Twitter page before your visits and get a feel for how the office uses social media.

While elected officials typically aren't camera-shy, staffers generally aren't used to having photos taken, let alone shared on social media sites. However, sharing photos of you and your colleagues outside the office or in front of the building is a great way to highlight your visit and your work. You can post photos to Twitter or Facebook to increase engagement. Research has shown that Tweets with photos get 18 percent more clicks, 89 percent more favorited, and 150 percent more retweets!

5. Use the best hashtag. If you are involved an advocacy campaign, use the commonly accepted hashtag for that campaign in all the messages you post about your legislative visits, so that others interested in this issue can easily search and follow related tweets. For example, **#HCR** is the hashtag about health care reform; **#ChangeMentalHealth** is part of a campaign to reduce stigmas and barriers to accessing care; and **#StandforScience** encourages continued support and funding for scientific research.

6. Keep your messages short for maximum retweeting potential. Twitter lets you share up to 140 characters. But research shows that messages most likely to get retweeted and shared are between 100-120 characters. Break your thought into 2-3 tweets if you need to express something lengthier.

7. Tweet at APAGS (@APAGradStudents) and APA (@APA), as well as other organizations and coalition that you want to either update or invite to share your message.

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For more advocacy tools, visit www.apa.org/apags/resources/advocacy/toolkit.aspx.

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