

Using Social Media for Your Town Hall Meeting Webinar Questions-and-Answers Summary

On March 15, 2014, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) hosted a webinar on using social media to promote Town Hall Meetings. The webinar identified tactics, tips, and tools on how to use social media before, during, and after a Town Hall Meeting. During and after the webinar, the presenter (Rose Hooks, ICF contractor and social media specialist) received several questions from the audience. This question-and-answer summary presents responses to all of the questions received. A glossary and list of helpful resources begins on page 7. For additional information, please send an e-mail to info@stopalcoholabuse.net.

Please note that the content of this summary was prepared under a contract from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, SAMHSA. Responses to the questions do not necessarily represent the policy or views of SAMHSA, nor do they imply endorsement by the Department and Agency.

Hashtags

How do you find out if your organization has a hashtag already?

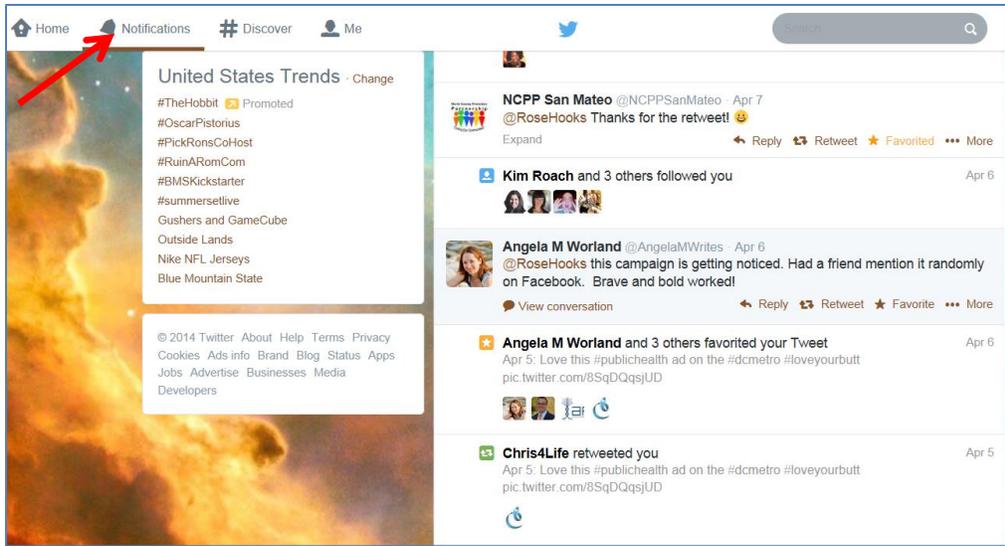
To identify the hashtag that your organization is currently using, I recommend contacting the person or communications team that manages your organization's social media accounts. I also recommend searching within the desired platform. Here's some guidance on how to search on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#).

You can also explore your organization's social media accounts by visiting the social media websites on which your organization has a presence and go through some of the posts to see if you can see anything related to the Town Hall Meetings and if your organization is using a hashtag.

Where do I find all of those people who comment back with a hashtag in Twitter? Will comments come to me?

If people comment back and they reply to you, Twitter will send you an e-mail giving notification that someone has mentioned you or replied to your tweet. You may have to [set up e-mail notification in your account preferences](#).

In addition, after you log onto Twitter, you can click on the "Notification" button at the top of the page, you can see how people are interacting with you. So you can also see if people are replying or if they are even retweeting or "favoriting" a tweet; all of the activity will be given. (See examples on next page.)



If you have a Facebook profile, you will get a [notification](#) on the top-right corner when anyone interacts with your Facebook page.

You can also track the overall hashtag activity by searching for the hashtag on that desired social media platform, as mentioned before, or using a free tool, such as Topsy, and entering the hashtag in the search bar. Because some people may forget to mention your organization, it's another tool to help you see the social media activity generated around your organization and/or your Town Hall Meeting.



How do we know that the hashtag will actually go to another source?

To identify who uses your hashtag and where it's used, you will want to track the hashtag on the desired social media platforms (please see **“Where do I find all of those people who comment back with a hashtag in Twitter? Will comments come to me?”** for more directions). If you want to ensure that people are using your hashtag, you may want to consider making a direct ask by sending an e-mail or making a phone call to your contact at a different organization to ensure that it is using your hashtag to help you spread the word.

You mentioned a website or service that will analyze your hashtag.

[RowFeeder](#) is a [free](#) service for a certain number of posts, and then if you need to upgrade, it charges a minimal fee. RowFeeder captures all of the activity using the hashtag, and it generates automatic reports about who has been the most influential (those with a large following, those actively engaged in online conversations about your topics of interest, a well-known organization, etc.) using the hashtag, who has been the most active in using the hashtag, and the overall activity throughout the course of your tracking.

What is #FF?

#FF stands for “Follow Friday.” Follow Friday is a Twitter trend where people are encouraged to recommend accounts that people can follow. It’s a huge compliment in the world of social media to be recommended. If you want to make a Follow Friday tweet, do the following:

- Look at the accounts that you are following on Twitter (by visiting your profile and selecting “Following”).
- Select four or five accounts that you want to recommend. You can find a common theme by topic of interest, location, etc. Or you can pick the accounts of those that have followed you most recently. You can really select them by your preference.
- Write a tweet with the selected accounts and the hashtag. An example tweet: “Thanks for the follow @SAMHSA @CDCgov @womenshealth @HHSgov #FF.”

Posting on Social Media

What was the name of the tool that helps you plan tweets for Twitter?

The tool is called [HootSuite](#), and it provides a [free service](#) that allows you to schedule your posts in advance. The advantage is that you can send out tweets during times when you are busy elsewhere.

In a short event such as a Town Hall Meeting, is there time to post during the event?

Absolutely! Even if it’s posting some visuals and a few tweets saying, “We’re having fun here, be sure to stop by, you still have time.” You definitely don’t need to have an hour-long event to have a reason to live-tweet; you can still just say, “We’re here, please join us.” You can also answer any frequently asked question about your Town Hall Meeting.

Is that @ symbol a tag?

Yes. For both Facebook and Twitter, if you hit the @ symbol on your keyboard and you begin to type the name of your organization, the platform you’re using can figure out who you are talking about and pull that name up for you. You click on it, and it is then tagged into that post.

If you are tweeting once a day, the end of the week doesn’t apply, right?

For posting frequency, think about weaving your Town Hall Meeting promotion content into your overall social media content. If you are going to limit how many days you post, I recommend aiming for the end of the week to increase the chances that people will engage with your tweets to further promote your upcoming Town Hall Meeting. Engagement means retweets, comments, Likes, etc., to increase your reach and exposure.

How do you respond to negative comments?

For negative comments, you have the opportunity to decide which comments you want to respond to and which you want to disregard. Sometimes it’s good to have negative comments. It’s good to have a different view of things, and you can say, “Thank you for your feedback; we appreciate that” and provide an appropriate response. Think about what you want to say because it’s likely that other people

can see and read those comments. Keep in mind that you're not only responding to that one person who posed the question but that you're also responding to other people that may have similar thoughts or concerns. You don't want to come across as a dismissive and ignore everything, but you can select comments to which you respond. By responding, you will encourage a two-way dialogue, and that's very important for social media.

You can look at some other social media accounts. For example, one of the accounts that I referred to, the National Cancer Institute's (NCI) [Smokefree Women](#) or even the [CDC \[Centers for Disease Control and Prevention\] Tobacco Free](#) Facebook pages—they have some people that do post some negative comments on their Facebook posts, and they select which ones that they will respond to, per their social media policies.

If we want to post pictures or videos at events, do we just need verbal permission, not written? What if the pictures or videos are of youth?

Does your organization have a social media policy or a web policy? A short waiver form can be available for people to quickly sign at your event.

And if you don't feel comfortable, you can limit your photos to employees, team members, and your spokespeople. But you can definitely have a waiver form if your organization's policy is to use a waiver for posting pictures on its website. I recommend following the same protocol as that of your organization.

Growing Your Social Media Community

How would you get influential people to follow you?

If you've identified accounts that you want to connect with on social media, the first thing you want to do is follow them. And then you engage with them. For example, if they tweet about something that you think fits with your focus area, I recommend responding to that tweet with a comment in real time to show that you're actually a real account, that you're not some robotic account, and that you're really going to engage with them. You can also retweet them, as that's something people appreciate on social media. It's considered a kind gesture in the world of Twitter.

Another idea is to do a #FollowFriday mention. Most people will appreciate the #FollowFriday mention, and they will likely say, "Oh, wow, they mentioned me in their Follow Friday post, how nice." And they will likely thank you, and then, hopefully, they will follow you back; again, it's all about social media etiquette, and I have found that to be very helpful in building relationships on Twitter.

What are some tips to increase your audience prior to a big event? For example, how would one go about getting more followers on Twitter?

Below are a few tips to help you to increase your online community:

- ***Promote your social media accounts across your online and offline marketing channels.*** If you haven't already, link to your social media accounts on your website and in your next e-newsletter/e-blast. You can add your social media accounts to your printed materials, such as

your brochures or flyers. You can also encourage people to follow your social media accounts during speaking engagements and presentations.

- **Optimize your Twitter bio.** Optimizing means that you should include keywords as they relate to your organization and how you want your organization to be found. When people search for a specific keyword that you've listed in your bio, you have a higher chance of users finding your account and then, hopefully, following you.
- **Get active on Twitter!** Participate in live-tweeting when you attend conferences, and join Twitter chats that are related to your focus area. When you show that you're engaged, more people are likely to follow you.
- **Cross promote your social media accounts.** Let your Facebook fans know that you're on Twitter, and let your Twitter followers know that you're on Facebook.
- **Follow local influencers in your community and engage with them.** Follow partner organizations, news stations, and government officials, for example. Engage with them with a retweet, a reply, or a #FollowFriday shout-out to increase the chances that they'll follow you back.

Those are just a few tips to help you increase your followers. Remember that quality is more important than quantity. It's better to have 50 people who are truly active and engaged as opposed to 500 people who don't do anything to help you achieve your social media goals (people with inactive accounts, etc.).

Monitoring and Measuring Social Media

What was the name of the program that checks a conversation that does not tag your organization?

You can track using [Topsy](#). You also can search on a social media platform by going on the search toolbar for Facebook or Twitter, or both, and search the keywords or hashtags that you're trying to monitor. See **"How do you find out if your organization has a hashtag already?"** and **"Where do I find all of those people who comment back with a hashtag in Twitter? Will comments come to me?"** (above questions) for additional guidance.

Social Media Platforms

Students and parents in our community favor Instagram for the social media experience. Is this platform viable for our purposes, and how can we capitalize on this opportunity?

Some organizations are using Instagram, which focuses on getting people to use the hashtag to develop user-generated content.

If your audience members are active on Instagram, make sure that they are aware of your hashtag and that they are using it to post photos (share the event hashtag on your registration page, flyer, etc.). And then you could create an Instagram account and use your designated hashtag to post some of your own event pictures. You can also use Instagram to post pictures of things going on around your organization that you think will grab attention visually. If you do create an Instagram account, be sure to create a plan that focuses on a long-term presence, as opposed to promoting only your Town Hall Meeting.

For examples, check out a few organizations that have an Instagram account, including [CDC](#) and NCI's [Smokefree Women](#) initiative. Explore those two accounts to see how they maintain a professional organization presence on Instagram and how that differs from a personal account.

What about using Pinterest?

Pinterest could be a great way to have something similar to a photo-sharing album. You can create a board and then add the photos from your event to that board. If you want to use Pinterest, first consider your audience members: Are they active on that platform? Then look to find an example of another organization implementing your desired activity. Explore the organization's account to see what's working and what's not working and if it fits with your overall social media and Town Hall Meeting goals.

Social Media Advertising

What are your thoughts about buying ad booths on Facebook?

Facebook has a new formula where it encourages organizations or Facebook pages to buy Facebook ads to increase the chances that their content will be seen in newsfeeds (the log of status updates when a person logs in to Twitter or Facebook). If you have the budget for it, consider exploring Facebook ads as a promotional tactic, perhaps by doing a [promoted Facebook post](#) (one of many advertising options within Facebook). If you don't have the budget, you can still increase views of your post through other tactics that encourage people to engage with your content (integrate a "call-to-action" in your desired posts, for example). The more engagement you have, the more likely your content will show up in social media newsfeeds.

Miscellaneous

Does requiring people to register for an event via social media or an online service increase attendance or deter people from attending?

Consider creating a social media event page as an *additional* option for people to RSVP. By requiring people to RSVP via social media, you risk turning away potential attendees who aren't very active on social media (or those who don't use social media at all) or who prefer to not have that activity connected with their social media activity (if they RSVP on Facebook, the event shows up in their friends' newsfeed).

If you require people to RSVP online, consider using [Eventbrite](#). That way, those who don't have a Facebook profile or a Twitter account can still register. To RSVP on Eventbrite, your invitees will need only an e-mail address.

Provide all the links to websites and products named in the seminar.

The links to the additional resources and tools mentioned during the webinar can be found below.

- **Hootsuite:** Hootsuite provides a free service allowing you to schedule your posts in advance. See <https://hootsuite.com>.

- **Eventbrite:** Eventbrite allows your invitees to RSVP online by using only an e-mail address. See <http://www.eventbrite.com>.
- **Storify:** Storify is a social network service that lets the user create stories or timelines using social media such as Twitter, Facebook and Instagram. See <http://storify.com>.

Glossary and List of Helpful Resources

All tools listed below are free, unless noted otherwise.

Bitly (<https://bitly.com>): Bitly is a utility that allows users to shorten a long URL, share it, and then track the resulting usage.

Eventbrite (<http://www.eventbrite.com>): Eventbrite is an online ticketing service that allows event organizers to plan, set up ticket sales (tickets can be sold for free), promote events, and publish them across Facebook, Twitter, and other social networking tools directly from the website. It also enables attendees to find and RSVP to these events.

Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com>): Facebook is a popular free social networking website that allows registered users to create profiles, upload photos and video, send messages, and keep in touch with friends, family, and colleagues.

Favoriting: Favoriting is hitting the star icon to bookmark a tweet.

Flickr (<https://www.flickr.com>): Flickr (pronounced "flicker") is an image-hosting and video-hosting website.

Hashtag: According to Twitter.com, users add the hashtag symbol before words or phrases to their tweets to categorize them for others and to organize conversations around a theme, be it an event, observance, etc.

HootSuite (<https://hootsuite.com>): HootSuite is a social media management system for businesses and organizations to collaboratively execute campaigns across multiple social networks from one secure, web-based dashboard.

Instagram (<http://instagram.com/#>): Instagram is a mobile photo-sharing, video-sharing, and social networking service that enables its users to take pictures and videos, apply digital filters to them, and share them on a variety of social networking services.

Liking: Liking is hitting the "Like" button on a Facebook status update.

LinkedIn (<https://www.linkedin.com>): LinkedIn is the leading online professional directory of individuals and companies. Individuals use LinkedIn for professional networking, connecting, and job searching. Companies use LinkedIn for recruiting and for providing company information to prospective employees.

Live-tweeting: Live-tweeting is posting tweets in real time during an event.

Retweeting: Retweeting is hitting the retweet button to repost a message on a Twitter account.

RowFeeder (<https://rowfeeder.com>): RowFeeder is a service that will let you track search terms on Twitter. You enter the term or hashtag, and Rowfeeder collects the raw data of every public post that contained that term or hashtag and then provides analysis reports on those searches for you.

Sharing: Sharing is clicking on the “Share” feature for a Facebook status update.

Social media engagement: Social media engagement is how people interact with your social media posts, i.e., liking, sharing, retweeting, or favoriting.

Storify (<https://storify.com>): Storify is a social network service that lets the user create stories or timelines using social media such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. Users search through multiple social networks from one place and then drag individual elements into stories. Users can reorder the elements and also add text to help give context to the readers.

Tagging: Tagging is a way to attach a social media account to your post. Tagging makes it easy for your followers to see who you’re talking about, and it also ensures that the tagged organization knows that you’re talking about it. Tagging is a friendly way to help promote another organization’s social media account.

Topsy (<http://topsy.com>): Topsy’s social media analytics allow you to search by time and place, set alerts, and analyze sentiment for every tweet ever made.

Tweet: Tweeting is posting a message on Twitter.

Twitter (<https://twitter.com>): Twitter is an online social networking and microblogging service that enables users to send and read short 140-character text messages, called “tweets.”

YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com>): YouTube is a video-sharing website.