

# Best Practices in Social Media Crisis Communications for State and Local Emergency Management Agencies

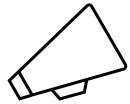
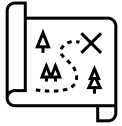
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# Background

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- CNA is an independent, nonprofit research and analysis organization dedicated to the safety and security of the nation.
- Inspired by direct work with SLTT emergency management agencies.
  - Observed unexpected challenges with social media for crisis communications.
  - Lack of guidance targeted at an appropriate level.
- Many lessons learned, but no way to share broadly.
- Social media is just one tool in the toolbox, but its influence is increasing.
  - Social media offers the opportunity for increased two-way communication with residents.
  - Residents may attempt to use social media to engage directly with emergency managers.
- SLTT emergency management agencies have numerous documented challenges with social media, including manpower, social media reach, coordination with partner agencies, reliance on manual processes when scanning for information, and a lack of mechanisms for applying crowdsourced information to traditional response actions.

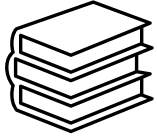
# Goals of the Study

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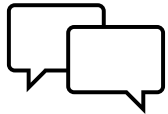
- 1. Develop a set of best practices** for state and local emergency management agencies for managing social media communications during an emergency by collecting lessons learned from state and local emergency management agencies with real world experience in crisis communications.
- 2. Understand the challenges, priorities, and lessons learned** for SLTT emergency management agencies with recent experience using social media for crisis communications
- 3. Discover innovative uses** of social media for crisis communications
- 4. Capture the current landscape** of capability in social media crisis communications, how widely certain best practices have been adopted, and what tools are most useful

# Methodology

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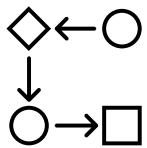
- Conducted a literature review, exploring the current state of guidance and best practices



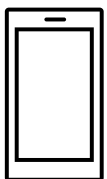
- Interviewed stakeholders at state and county public information officers within the emergency management departments
  - 15 State-level interviews
  - 2 County-level interviews



- Used a semi-structured interview approach supported by a set of standard questions



- Categorized and organized qualitative data into:
  - Challenges
  - Best practices
  - Priority areas for growth



- Primarily addressed Facebook and Twitter, but also discussed YouTube, Instagram, NextDoor, and others.

# Challenges



01

Validating information and detecting and combating the spread of misinformation and disinformation.



02

Keeping information up to date and preventing information from recirculating and becoming outdated.



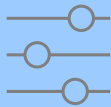
03

Using humor appropriately for blue sky engagement.



04

Equally engaging all demographics and all levels of social media literacy.



05

Maintaining a similar level of communication after an incident occurs, even when staff may be starting to experience burnout.



06

Maintaining the health and well-being of staff during deployments.



07

Recruiting and retaining social media staff.



08

Managing social media responsibilities with small teams.



09

Producing sophisticated graphics and videos.



10

Navigating politics and partisanship.



11

Reaching individuals in areas where cell phone and internet coverage may be sparse.



12

Incorporating artificial intelligence into social media operations.

# Best Practices



**1.** Be adaptable in your communication methods because different emergencies require different approaches.



**2.** Build up trust and credibility with your audience throughout the year by engaging online regularly, especially by humanizing your agency, staff, and partner agencies.



**3.** Coordinate messaging with neighboring jurisdictions, community organizations, local agencies, and the state to ensure consistency across all of government.



**4.** Maintain a cache of prepared messages to facilitate information distribution as appropriate.



**5.** Ensure that messaging is accessible to those with access and functional needs, is properly translated, and is culturally appropriate for intended audiences.



**6.** Provide information to the public proactively, as it is learned, noting that this information is preliminary and subject to change.



**7.** Use social media to direct people toward landing pages and resources that could be useful, such as interactive maps.



**8.** Develop a strategy for individuals using social media as emergency services operators.



**9.** Respond quickly to misinformation and disinformation and direct the poster to valid sources of information.



**10.** After the event, take stock of your metrics and wins and communicate the value of your social media crisis communications to leadership.

# Additional Best Practices

**01.** When a disaster occurs in your jurisdiction, familiarize yourself with the area on social media. Set up notifications for posts from the most important accounts

**02.** Use social media as your eyes and ears in the community and to ensure that your interventions have the intended impact

**03.** Request information from the public to support decision-making and use social media to track reports of damage

**04.** Campaign to get all residents in the jurisdiction to use the same hashtag for all disasters

**05.** Use social media to give rapid updates from the scene of an incident, when appropriate

**06.** Always provide context and next steps when sending an alert through social media

**07.** Write at a fourth-grade reading level to ensure that posts are accessible to a wide number of individuals

**08.** Engage with the community through direct messages and offer individualized support when needed

**09.** Use social media to guide and organize volunteer efforts

**10.** Be agile and prepared to pivot to new platforms. Different communities favor different platforms

**11.** Have frank conversations with leadership about what humor might be appropriate for the community

**12.** Use caution when participating in trends and take time to understand the implications and subtext of the trend fully

**13.** When responding to social media comments, feel free to be less polished and more direct

**14.** Right-size the number of accounts for the agency

**15.** For agencies with multiple accounts, designate one account that can post humorous things during blue skies but have all accounts mirror each other during emergencies

**16.** Post roughly once per hour during an incident

**17.** Date your social media posts to prevent outdated information from circulating

**18.** Create videos that are not rooted in a particular time, date, or incident to use between emergencies

**19.** Continuously learn about social media platforms

**20.** Use software with analytic capabilities to identify ways to increase your engagement

**21.** Have at least one backup agency

**22.** Co-locate social media staff with 911 operators or a fusion center to facilitate an exchange of information

**23.** Stay above the politics

# Priority Areas for Growth

**01.** Expanding to different social media platforms.

**02.** Using quantitative analysis tools to improve reach and engagement.

**03.** Expanding collaboration with partner agencies.

**04.** Becoming proactive rather than reactive.

**06.** Dedicating staff to social media full-time.

**07.** Securing translations and access and functional needs capabilities.

**05.** Building out data mining capabilities.

**10.** Growing a more diversified workforce in the emergency management community.

**08.** Exploring best practices in using social media to harness volunteers during response and recovery.

**09.** Discontinuing the practice of issuing press releases

**11.** Educating the public and eliminating misconceptions about the field of emergency management.

# Questions?

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To download a copy of the whitepaper, please visit [www.CNA.org](http://www.CNA.org).

Or contact Jamie Biglow: [biglowj@cna.org](mailto:biglowj@cna.org).

Thank you!