

Digital Advocates

Mobilizing Action through Social Media



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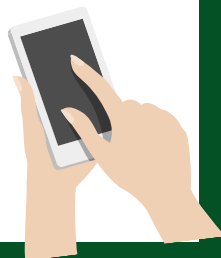
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Introduction

So, you want to be a digital advocate? Great!

This guidebook, created by the **International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES)**, is designed to help young changemakers like you use social media to lead and advance advocacy efforts - supporting the rights of all people and their participation in civic and political life, even during crises like the COVID-19 pandemic.



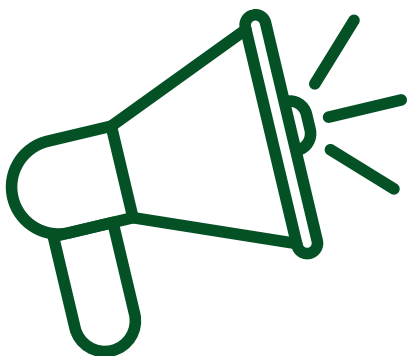
What is Advocacy?

Advocacy is the deliberate process of influencing policymakers and those who can drive change. It addresses the root causes of social injustices and is a powerful way to organize community action.

Advocacy is a long-term process and is most effective during election periods or when newly elected officials take office.

As the world becomes more connected, social media is a powerful place to advocate for change. It allows you to leverage your organization's networks -- members, employees, and supporters -- to share and amplify your message.

The more people who elevate your cause through their own networks, the greater your reach, visibility, and impact.

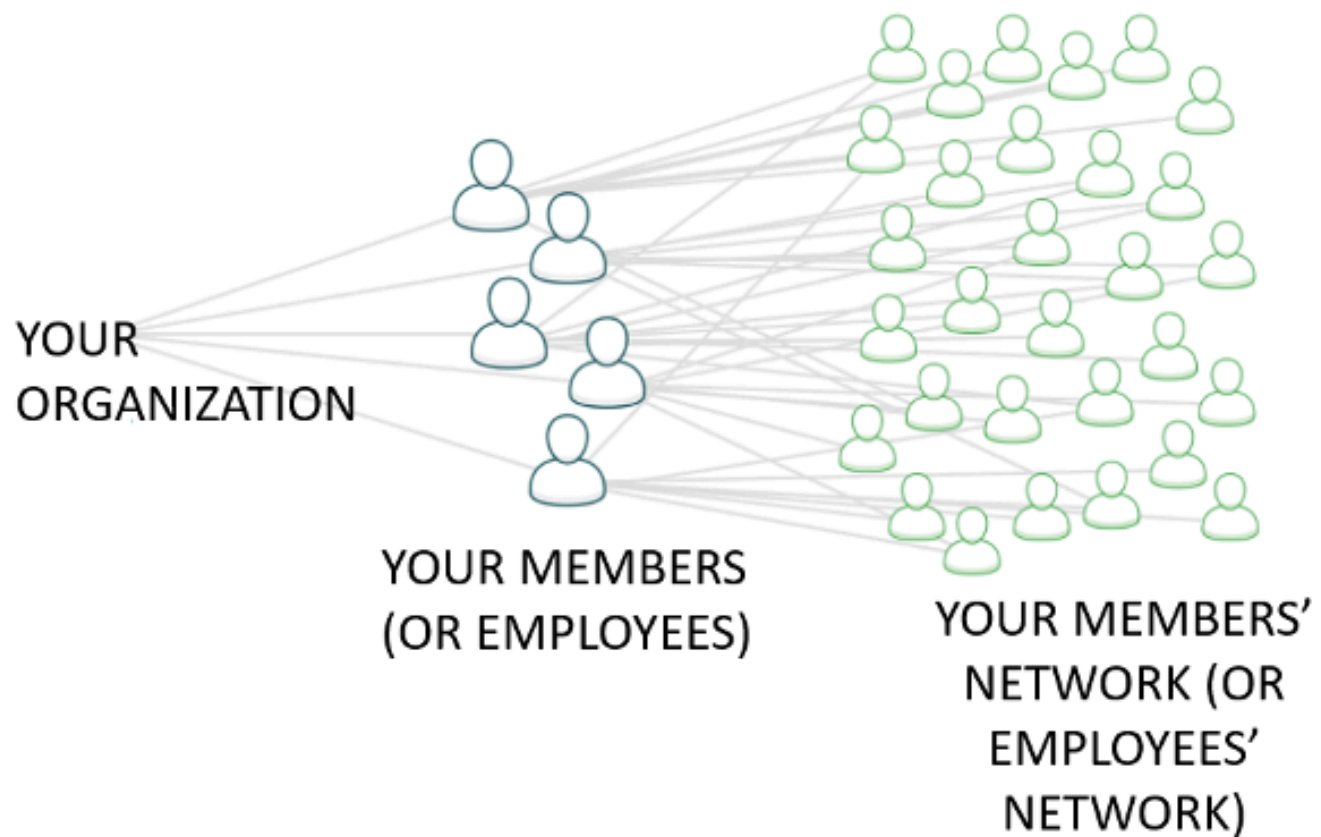


What is Social Media Advocacy?

Social media is one of the most effective tools for CSOs to expand their reach and foster community engagement. It works best as part of a broader advocacy strategy, integrated into your overall communications planning.

Used well, social media can:

- Empower CSOs and their members to advocate with greater impact.
- Reach broader, more diverse audiences.
- Leverage community networks to facilitate information sharing.
- Enable interactive communication and public engagement to amplify your message.
- Personalize and target messages to specific audiences.



Steps for Planning A Social Media Advocacy Campaign

I. Define your goal

Start by clearly defining what you want to achieve.

Use these questions to guide the process:

- What do you want your advocacy to accomplish?
- Are there both short and long-term goals?

Set SMART goals that are:

- Specific in definition
- Measurable against targets
- Achievable with current resources
- Relevant to the local context
- Timebound with clear deadlines



Common goals include building organizational awareness, empowering your community, raising awareness for a specific cause, attracting new members or donors, and engaging existing members more effectively.

Tips for success:

- Include representatives from diverse identity groups -- such as ethnic, religious, LGBTQ+, gender, disability, and age communities -- in the goal-setting process.
- Once you have a draft, share it broadly to gather feedback from those who may want to support your efforts.



Steps for Planning A Social Media Advocacy Campaign

2. Identify your audience and allies

Target audience:

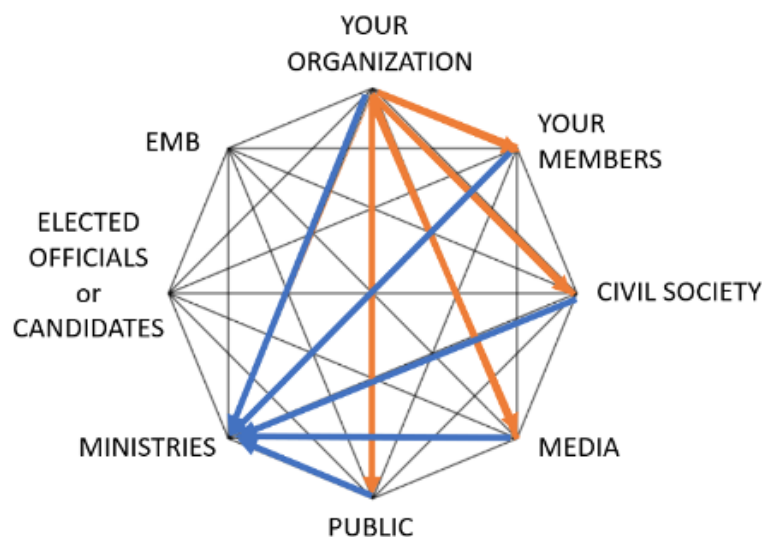
- Your target audience is typically the decision-makers or influencers you need to persuade to achieve your goal. Consider identifying key individuals or institutions who can directly bring about change, as well as those who can influence them. This might include civil society, government officials, elected representatives, candidates, electoral management bodies (EMBs), community members, or voters.

Allies:

- Allies are stakeholders who actively support your goal. They can offer skills, resources, and relationships with those in power. A strong network of allies also helps limit the damage spoilers can do to your efforts.

Spoilers:

- Spoilers are stakeholders who may try to block your advocacy. Proactively engaging potential spoilers -- such as senior leaders who may feel threatened by younger advocates -- and bringing them on side is the best way to neutralize opposition before it starts.



Steps for Planning A Social Media Advocacy Campaign

When identifying your target audience, consider the following:

What is the administrative structure in your country or area?

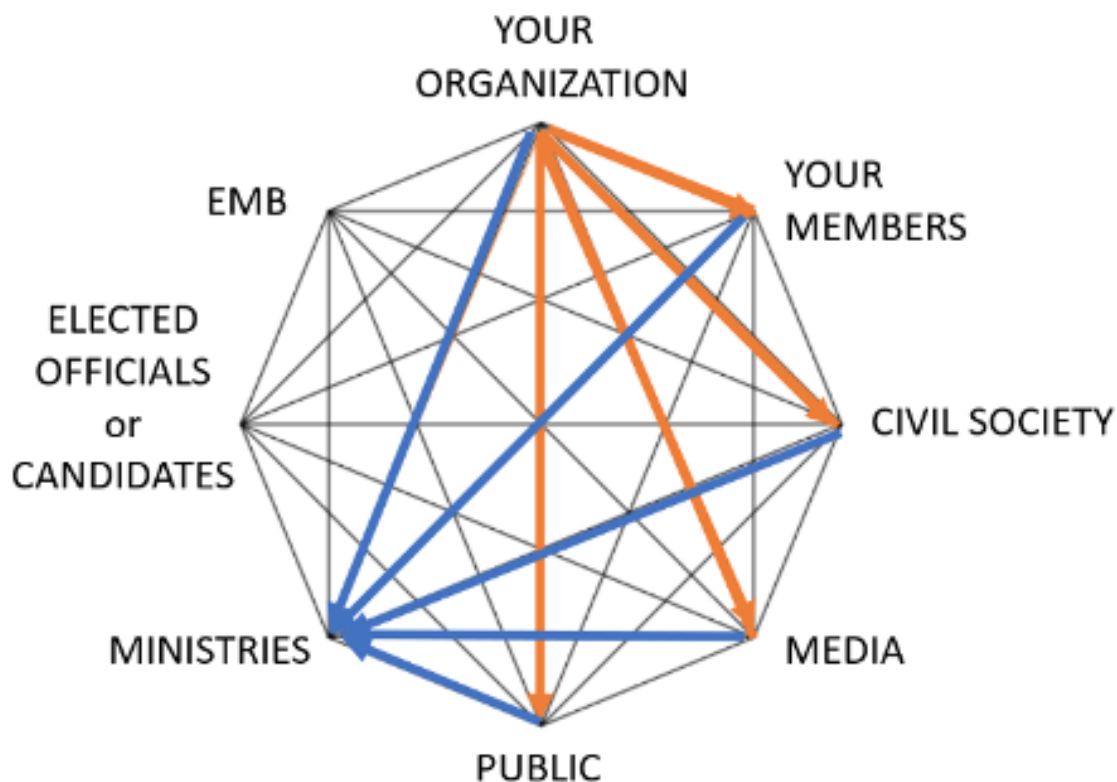
- Understanding the hierarchy of authority will help you identify who holds decision-making power. If key decision-makers aren't directly accessible, identify allies within the hierarchy who can help you work through the right channels.

Who are the influencers?

- Influencers are people or organizations who can communicate your message and persuade decision-makers -- for example, a youth leader with a strong social media following in your area.

What motivates your target audience?

- Understanding your audience's interests and beliefs allows you to frame your advocacy in a way that resonates with them and advances your goal.



Steps for Planning A Social Media Advocacy Campaign

3. Select your platform and activities

Once you've defined your goals, audience, and key messages, you can choose the platforms best suited to reach them.

Not all platforms serve every goal equally -- Facebook is great for networking and conversation, while Instagram works well for short, visual content. Both allow users to like, comment, and share your posts, helping to extend your reach and engagement.

Hashtags

Hashtags are words or phrases preceded by the # symbol. They help spread your message organically to people who already follow similar topics or causes, and make your content easier to discover. You can create your own hashtag or tap into existing ones like #youth, #participation, or #COVID19.

When using hashtags:

- Tag hashtags your target audience already follows to draw their attention to your campaign.
- Use capital letters for each word to improve readability (e.g. #YouthParticipation).
- Research hashtags before using them to make sure they aren't already associated with another group or campaign.
- Keep a consistent set of hashtags across all posts related to a specific campaign so your content stays connected and discoverable.



Steps for Planning A Social Media Advocacy Campaign

Virtual protests and strikes

Virtual protests and strikes are a safe and accessible way to organize, particularly during crises like the COVID-19 pandemic.

They allow digital activists to raise awareness, share messages, and push for change while reaching a wide and diverse audience.



A well-known example is climate activist Greta Thunberg, who launched #ClimateStrikeOnline to continue her protests against the Swedish Parliament as COVID-19 cases rose in Sweden.



Steps for Planning A Social Media Advocacy Campaign

Storytelling

Storytelling is a powerful, interactive way to share information and personal experiences. It can be done live or pre-recorded across Facebook, Instagram, or TikTok, and is most impactful when it's timely -- for example, sharing a personal anecdote during a virtual strike about why the cause matters to you.

A strong story has a clear structure:

Beginning

- What is your connection to the cause?
- What does the audience need to know to understand the story?

Middle

- What is the main action or event?
- What are the key points?

End

- What do you want people to take away?
- Is there a specific action you want people to take?



Steps for Planning A Social Media Advocacy Campaign

Storytelling Continued

Tip for success: Protect your personal information by minimizing specific details -- such as exact dates, locations, and names -- while keeping the integrity of your story intact.

Virtual site tours

Use Facebook Events or Instagram Live to take viewers on a tour of your organization or a partner organization, highlighting the issues behind your advocacy or the impact of your cause. Encourage viewers to observe and comment.

You could:

- Record a walkthrough of an advocacy activity.
- Host a live video introducing your organization and its work.

Before going live or recording, make sure to:

- Decide which parts of your work are most important for the audience to see.
- Plan how you'll describe your organization and connect it to positive change in your community.
- Have someone else hold the camera so the audience can focus on you.
- Practice recording or using the platform beforehand.



Steps for Planning A Social Media Advocacy Campaign

4. Create content

Integrating social media into your advocacy campaign can motivate your community, encourage participation, and spark conversation -- all of which help spread your message and influence your target audience. Mix regular content with your advocacy messages, and consider which days and times are best for posting.

Quick content ideas:

- Use relevant hashtags.
- Share interesting stats related to your cause.
- Run a survey or poll.
- Promote a relevant activist or partner organization.
- Ask your audience a question or share a testimonial quote.
- Highlight a news story about your cause or a community event.
- Use graphics, memes, photos, videos, and links to relevant articles or podcasts.
- Join relevant Facebook groups and participate actively -- you'll gain valuable insights into what matters to your community.
- Post a call to action -- these tend to drive higher engagement than other content types.



Steps for Planning A Social Media Advocacy Campaign

Tips for more success on Facebook

- Use videos and set posts to "public" to gain followers.
- Post content that encourages meaningful comments to facilitate conversation and relationship building.
- Post and share content in relevant groups and events, as many people visit Facebook specifically for these.
- Like and comment on pages with similar interests, as Facebook prioritizes content from accounts you engage with.



Tips for more success on Instagram

- Use Reels, as short-form video content continues to grow in popularity.
- Post consistently -- aim for once a day, every other day, or at least twice a week.
- Respond to comments within the first three hours of posting.



Tips for content creation

- Be honest – Believable messages come from people who are genuine. If a message seems fake, stakeholders will ignore it.
- Be direct – Clearly explain the change you want to see.
- Ground messages in human rights – Human rights-based advocacy is more likely to change minds and have a lasting impact.
- Be consistent – If creating multiple materials, ensure messages don't conflict. Use consistent wording, hashtags, or slogans.
- Test it out – Before sharing, consider how the stakeholder might receive the message.



Steps for Planning A Social Media Advocacy Campaign

5. Keep up engagement

Build partnerships with other organizations and influencers to expand your reach. Potential partners include media outlets, national or international organizations, CSOs from different fields, and companies.

Partnering with a social media influencer can be a fast, effective way to boost awareness and shift perceptions around your cause. They don't need expertise in your advocacy area -- a well-known athlete or public figure can be just as impactful -- but make sure their values align with your platform.

Other tips for posting regularly and staying responsive:

- Develop a response plan for frequently asked questions and common comments.
- Prepare key messages to use when addressing inaccurate or disparaging content.
- Create a code of conduct for your social media use, including how to handle and report abusive language.
- Plan ahead and avoid impulsive posting.
- Personalize responses to comments where possible.
- Respond promptly to keep engagement going.



Steps for Planning A Social Media Advocacy Campaign

5. Keep up engagement

Conducting advocacy online can increase your risk of cyberattacks.

Keep these safety tips in mind:

- Use organizational social media accounts rather than personal ones.
- Never share personal details -- such as passwords, bank account information, or addresses -- on social media, in emails, or by text.
- Weigh the risks of live posts or livestreams versus prerecorded content.
- Create a policy for handling trolls.
- Consider how your advocacy efforts could be misinterpreted by those in positions of power, and plan accordingly.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also contributed to an "infodemic" of misinformation.

To navigate this:

- Identify reputable sources of information in your country.
- Always cross-check across multiple sources before sharing.



Tips for Ethical Social Media Use

1. Be yourself

- Treat your social media community like family and friends to create a space where people feel comfortable expressing their opinions.
- People engage most with content that is sincere, positive, and genuine.

2. Be honest

- Share information that is useful to others.
- Explain why you're posting so your content doesn't come across as having a hidden agenda.

3. Be open

- Good communication and rapport build trust with your followers.
- Facilitate inclusive conversations and engage users from diverse backgrounds.

4. Combat fake news and disparaging remarks

What you post online is more permanent than spoken words, and easier for others to misuse. Here's how to handle difficult interactions:

- Focus on the issue, not the person, when responding to negative comments.
- Clarify misinformation and restate the value of your message while staying respectful.
- Speak from your own experience using "I" language -- such as "I feel..." or "I understand..."
- Always get permission before sharing someone else's information or experiences.
- Reflect on difficult conversations and look for ways to improve next time.



Tips for Ethical Social Media Use

How do I mark a Facebook post as false news?

[Computer Help](#)

[Mobile Help](#) ▾

[Share Article](#)

To mark a post as false news:

- 1 Click *** next to the post you'd like to mark as false.
- 2 Click **Find support or report post**.
- 3 Click **False News**, then click **Next**.
- 4 Click **Done**.



▼ How can I flag false information on Instagram?

To report a post as false information on Instagram:

1. Tap *** (iOS) or ⋮ (Android) above the post.
2. Tap **Report**.
3. Tap **False information**.
4. Tap **Send**.



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