



**American
Red Cross**

Online Communications Guidelines

Version 2.0

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Online Communications Guidelines

Introduction

The Red Cross has no better advocates than its legion of employees and volunteers. Social engagement – the use of social media tools such as Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Google+, Instagram, YouTube, and FourSquare – is a popular means for showing Red Cross pride. It can also be used for communicating with and inspiring our stakeholders (donors, clients, partners, fans). This document offers tips and tools to guide your participation in social communities on behalf of the Red Cross.

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Be a Good Social / Mobile Citizen

Whether or not your personal presence on the social web involves the Red Cross, here are some tips for being a good online and mobile citizen.

- a. **BE ACCURATE:** Your network depends on you to tell the truth. Have fun, but make sure any news you report has been verified. If you're retweeting, sharing, or otherwise linking to someone else's content, give him/her credit.
- b. **BE RELEVANT:** Post content that invites responses – then stay engaged. Find others who have shared interests, cite them and ask them questions.
- c. **BE CONSIDERATE:** Encourage healthy debate but don't inflame others.
- d. **BE TRANSPARENT:** If you make a mistake, admit it. Be upfront and be quick with your correction.
- e. **BE HUMAN:** The social web is like a dinner party. Be yourself, but with good manners.
- f. **BE COMPASSIONATE:** Even though many connections on the social web are with people you might never meet in person, be a friend.

Be a Red Cross Advocate

You do not have to be a Red Cross advocate with your personal social networking accounts. You are not obligated to engage with stakeholders, support campaigns, or use these tools to connect with other subject matter experts in your field. You are in charge of your own presence online.

If you do want to take any of these actions, we ask that you abide by the following guidelines:.

- a. Follow the [Code of Conduct](#) and [Fundamental Principles](#).
 - i. When you were hired either as an employee or a volunteer, you signed the Code of Conduct and were made aware of the Fundamental Principles. They both apply to your activities on the social and mobile web.
- b. DISCLOSURE
 - i. If you are typing or posting anything about the Red Cross, you have a duty to disclose your relationship to the organization. Use your real name, identify that you work or volunteer for Red Cross, and be clear about your role.
 - ii. If you have a vested interest in the conversation, disclose your interest with specifics.
 - iii. Be yourself. Stick to your area of expertise and write what you know. It is helpful to type something like, "These are my thoughts and do not necessarily represent the Red Cross."
- c. BE RESPONSIBLE
 - i. Do not violate our clients' privacy. Before you post any identifying information via text, photo, or video, you must have a [signed release](#).
 - ii. Do not post financial or service delivery numbers until they are triple checked, approved, and publicly published by the Red Cross. We value transparency, but want to avoid publishing conflicting reports.
 - iii. Remember if you're online, you're on the record.
- d. USE COMMON SENSE
 - i. Perception is reality and in social networks. The lines between public and private, personal and professional are blurred. Just by identifying yourself as a Red Cross employee or volunteer, you are creating perceptions about your expertise and about Red Cross.

Social Engagement Platforms

Below you'll find specific guidelines for each major social networking platform.

Twitter

- We encourage all staff and volunteers who wish to be Red Cross advocates on Twitter to include your Red Cross affiliation in your bio, but NOT in your handle. For example, it is better to be @Gloria than @RedCrossGloria.
- It is a best practice to include language in your bio that your tweets do not necessarily represent the official position of the Red Cross.

Facebook

- If you want to be a Red Cross advocate on Facebook, please include your affiliation on your profile in the About → Work and Education section. If you are a volunteer, click Life Event → Work and Education → Volunteer Work to share your affiliation with the Red Cross on your Facebook Timeline.

Blog/Tumblr/Posterous/Personal Website

- You do not have to list your affiliation with the Red Cross in your "Bio" or "About" section. However, if you do write a post about the Red Cross, it is best to be transparent and mention your affiliation at the beginning of the post.

Photo and Video Sharing (Flickr, Pinterest, Instagram, etc.)

- We recommend you keep a signed release form for all photos and videos you personally post of individuals – whether they are Red Cross staff, volunteers, clients, donors, course takers, etc.
- If your field unit posts any of your photos or videos containing identifiable people, please be sure the field unit has a copy of the signed release form for all individuals.
- If you send photos or videos to National Headquarters for posting, please also send signed release forms for all individuals appearing in the images to media3@usa.redcross.org.
- Explain the context of the picture or video you are sharing.

Finding the line between your personal and professional presence

We want you to feel comfortable with representing the Red Cross online while maintaining your individuality – chances are, you already use social media personally, so we want to help you figure out how to find the right balance for you.

As an advocate, you retain your own personal identity online and you can express yourself however you feel comfortable. When you discuss your Red Cross work or support a Red Cross campaign, you agree to follow the Code of Conduct and the Fundamental Principles.

People on the social web will be much more likely to converse with a human being than with a branded bot. While we want you to be accurate, ethical, and transparent when you discuss your work at the Red Cross, we don't want you to hide behind official messaging or simply use your account to push messages. We do want you to meet people with shared interests, build relationships, and have fun.

The social web has changed what it means to be professional. [Blogger Allison Fine created the below chart to mark the shift we've made to present ourselves as a living, breathing, entity.](#)

Old Professional 	New Professional
I am closed to the world	I am open and accessible to the world, strengthening my relationships with people
I can't make mistakes in public	I am human, when I inevitably make mistakes, I apologize quickly and sincerely.
I don't reveal my personal interests to the world	My interests, hobbies, passions make me interesting and attractive
I am expected to have the answers to questions	I am searching for answers with my network of colleagues and supporters
Power is taken and held	Power is shared and grown

Be Purposeful in your Online Privacy Settings

We want to give you tools not only to be a great Red Cross advocate online, but also to be savvy users of social platforms. The first and most important step towards this goal is knowing how to protect your privacy as well as the privacy of those around you.

- **Be an expert on setting privacy settings.** Stay up to date on the latest changes to privacy setting tools and review yours regularly.
 - If the settings ever seem too complicated, try Googling for tutorials or walk-throughs. Chances are, someone's already done the work of figuring them out.
- **Know your audience and proactively organize them if you can.**
 - Before adding someone as a "friend", make sure that you would be truly comfortable allowing that person to access the information you share with your friends. If not, you can either use privacy settings to restrict what the person can see, or you can keep them off of your friends list.
 - Before creating an account on a new social network, think through these questions: What will this social network help me accomplish? Who would I like to connect with on this network?
- **Always be aware of what is public.** Some networks are more public than others, and many give you the option to control what can be publically viewed and logged as searchable content.
 - Even though a small blog could feel like a personal corner of the internet, the reality is that blogs are completely public platforms, and can be pulled up in

searches. Adjust your content accordingly and never put up sensitive information on it.

- **Fact check and consider the safety and security of others.** If you are ever on official assignment or deployment for the Red Cross and are posting content about Red Cross related topics, be sensitive to the community you are serving (especially during disasters) and be cautious about sharing information before it is vetted. If you establish yourself as a Red Cross representative online, it is more likely that people will take speculative or un-verified information that you post and re-post it.
- **Remember:** You are not obligated to friend or follow anyone, and within Facebook and Google+ you can determine which parts of your presence others are able to see.

How to get additional training

The social engagement team is here to help you connect with your Red Cross peers online, and we encourage all of you to seek help, ask questions, and share experiences amongst each other.

- [Red Cross Social Heroes Facebook group](#) (you must request to join)
- [LinkedIn Red Cross page](#)
- [LinkedIn Red Cross group](#)
- [Twitter List of Red Cross social representatives](#)

You can always reach the social engagement team at socialmedia@redcross.org.

We also offer a free training course on social engagement for interested Red Cross volunteers and employees. To sign up for this course, please email us at socialmedia@redcross.org.