Minority Health and Health Disparities
Guidelines for Traditional and Social Media Use for Local Minority Health Disparities Programs

As local minority health disparities programs funded by the Maryland Office of Minority Health and Health Disparities (MHHD) move forward in their efforts with traditional and social media, we recognize the need for more guidance on using these tools effectively and in keeping with State of Maryland guidelines.

MHHD has compiled these policies to assist local minority health disparities programs focus their efforts and ensure traditional and social media use is professional and effective, through electronic communications, media, Facebook, Twitter, emails, newsletters, blogs, and other communications tools related to events or programs that are funded through MHHD.

These policies have been adapted from the State's Department of Information Technology and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:
>   http://doit.maryland.gov/Publications/DoITSecurityPolicy.pdf
>   http://www.cdc.gov/socialmedia/tools/guidelines/

The basics of an electronic, media, or social media message:
- Messages must promote health and well-being
- Content must be science-based, accurate, and appropriately sourced
- Messages should include a call to action or a call to change behavior
- Messages should encourage viewers to contact the program or link to more details

Content of message may include but is not limited to:
- Publicizing an upcoming health event
- News stories that reference your program
- Culturally relevant tips and suggestions to improve health
- Promoting engagement in health and well-being education or activities
- Information to help people access services
- Information to raise awareness of health disparities and risk factors

All health materials related to MHHD-funded events or programs must be cleared with MHHD prior to publication or distribution.

Programs, events, or activities funded through MHHD must be labeled as such on promotional materials.

Alert MHHD to existing social media you already use or create (such as Facebook, Twitter, a blog, website, etc.).

Maryland DHMH and MHHD both have Facebook pages and DHMH has a Twitter page. Also, most local health departments also have a Facebook and/or Twitter page. Local minority health disparities programs should become a "fan" or "follower" of other similar programs' social media pages to help increase communication among programs, maximize successes, minimize duplication, and expand social media reach.

Ensure all posts and distributed materials are appropriate, sensitive, and professional. Never mix your personal pages and professional pages. Political commenting or lobbying is prohibited. Take care that all posted materials and photos portray your program, MHHD, and staff or volunteers in a professional and appropriate light.

Golden Rules

Whether it's your agency website or a Twitter profile, the same criteria for accuracy and professionalism apply. Remember that what gets published to the web lives on indefinitely. The content represents your program, MHHD/DHMH, and the State of Maryland. It is growing fodder for news reports and fair game for media 'gotchas' so take all care and exercise judiciousness *before* uploading assets or information.

- **Proofread** – and while you're at it, make sure you are using [plain language](#) and avoiding acronyms and bureaucrat-speak.
- **Keep it short and concise** – competition for online attention is only growing.
- **Vet** – check the details, garner approval(s), and make sure info is consistent with other reputable published sources. Maintain an electronic or hard copy of the source to use as a reference if necessary.
- **Purge what is outdated** – nothing diminishes profiles or websites more than old news that is still there. Search engines will find it, even if you think it's buried, so make sure online information is timely and relevant or else dated appropriately.
- **Ensure copyright ownership** – Get permission in writing if published materials are not state-produced.

Social Media Tools

Websites

It is vital to note that none of the following enterprises can successfully function without the support and synchronization of the department's principle website. Your website is the starting point for all online information sharing. (If the information isn't there, don't tweet about it). Take care that pages and content are current and that links aren't broken.

Although many of the following resources may garner real-time attention, they are limited in scope, and typically provide teasers to 'learn more' on the main website. To be of value, such interaction should drive visitors to the most specific, timely, and targeted news that arises out of *their* expressed interests.

Facebook

Note that Facebook "profiles" are for individuals, but Facebook "pages" are used by programs and organizations. A Facebook page should be checked once a day at a minimum to interact with customers and monitor comments. Posting your information or photos can ensue as it relates to agency activity, but responding to constituents needs to be a frequent responsibility. News may be shared in the form of messages to groups or less-direct status updates and wall posts.

It is also important to become aware of account settings, filters and permissions and to customize them based on your goals and expectations (should you allow anyone to write anything on your 'wall'?).

Twitter

Twitter is effective in reaching a different market and also for the purpose of monitoring what others are saying about you and your programs and services. A Twitter account should be visited once a day at

a minimum to interact with customers, monitor comments about your department and/or programs, and post information, if relevant or timely.

RSS Feeds
RSS stands for Really Simple Syndication and allows visitors to subscribe to specific information on a site and obtain automatic notification when that content is updated.
The caveat with RSS is that subscribers need to manage their subscriptions by employing an RSS reader. Some browsers have, some don't.
DOIT's website has more info: http://doit.maryland.gov/about/Pages/RSS.aspx.
More people just sign in to their social media sites for feeds or updates – the result is similar: aggregating real-time info in a personalized way.

Email Newsletters
E-newsletters require significant work commitment in order to produce on an established production schedule. If you do one, establish opt-in only newsletter and track open rates and links followed. The email newsletters effectively drive your customers to information and services. You should be able to measure the results.

Blogs
You should consider blogs very carefully before trying to implement one. The challenge with open discussion forums is responsiveness and the ability to engage customers continually. Otherwise you seem like you don't care about the blog or your visitors. Moderation is a vital responsibility, and reacting to comments and content that are not your own, on a regular basis, requires a sustained commitment. Better yet, establish an approval process before posts are published. Spammers and other issues are also involved.

Web Videos
The most widely used format for web videos is .flv (Flash). More computers have the Flash Player plug-in than any other video format (quicktime, realmedia, windows media...), which reduces the need for users to download additional software to view. It is the recommended format for publishing to state sites. Such videos may also be considered for Maryland's YouTube channel (http://www.youtube.com/statemaryland), which accepts numerous file types, but will convert it to Flash video.

Writing for Social Media

- It's easy to get wrapped up in the technology when talking about social media, but flashy tools alone won't make a campaign effective—good content does.

- Social media content should be
    - Relevant, useful, and interesting
    - Easy to understand and share
    - Friendly, conversational, and engaging
    - Action-oriented

- Social media is most effective when the content relates to a particular interest or desire of a specific group of people.

- Because your target audience can receive multiple messages from multiple sources every day, make your messages *relevant, useful,* and *interesting* so your audience will interact and be engaged.

- Examples
  - *Interest-relevant Facebook post by CDC:*
    Radon is a gas that you cannot see, smell, or taste. Did you know it is the 2nd leading cause of lung cancer in the U.S.? Testing is the only way to know if radon levels are high in your home or office. CDC's Tracking Program has improved radon maps to inform testing. Read more: http://1.usa.gov/1II7rkV.
  - *Time-relevant tweet:*
    @CDCgov
    Winter storms and cold temps can be hazardous, but if you plan ahead, you can stay safe and healthy. Learn how: http://go.usa.gov/SpxQ

Got the social media bug and want to get started or make your posts better? We encourage you to visit the CDC's social media resources at www.cdc.gov/SocialMedia/Tools/guidelines for:
- **Social Media Toolkit**
- **Guide to Writing for Social Media**
- **Facebook Guidelines and Best Practices, and more**

CDC Best Practices: Facebook

1. Become familiar with other Facebook sites. There are several public health-related social network sites available with different targets, purposes and functions. Visiting other sites will help gain an understanding of the participants, the culture and the functionality.
It is important to note the difference between a Facebook page and an individual Facebook profile. Facebook pages are utilized by organizations and businesses while Facebook profiles are for individuals. Unlike profiles, pages are moderated by page administrators who logon to post content or monitor comments and they do not receive notifications when users take action.

2. Consider the overall communications strategy and objectives. Before launching a page, make sure social networking activities mesh with the overall communication strategy and objectives. Once a target audience has been identified, it is essential to determine if using a social networking site such as Facebook is an appropriate channel. Facebook is a public platform and, in most cases, reaches the general public. Specifically targeted Facebook pages can be developed to address healthcare providers, public health professionals and others. CDC Parents are the Key to Safe Teen Drivers is an example of a Facebook page that targets parents of teenagers.

3. Be thoughtful about resources. Ensure that adequate resources (time and staff) are available to support the ongoing maintenance of the page in order to keep content fresh and fans engaged.

4. Provide engaging posts and communication material on the site. Incorporate videos, quizzes, widgets, games, applications, images and other materials to actively and repeatedly engage users.

5. Create a comment policy. Develop a policy that covers the response to inappropriate or derogatory comments. Refer to CDC's Social Networking Comment Policy for an example: http://www.cdc.gov/SocialMedia/Tools/CommentPolicy.html.

6. Give careful consideration to associations with partner content. It is possible to display "featured likes", "like" or comment on partner status updates, and to share partner content. When considering promotion of partner page or engagement with their content, it is important to determine the advantages of the activity to ensure your organization's brand benefits by association with particular organizations, agencies or groups. Additional information can be found in CDC's Facebook Guideline and Best Practices.

7. Collect and store comments. Develop a system to archive comments.

8. Develop a promotion plan. Establish a promotion plan before launching the page; encourage fans to share and cross-promote using other social media channels and web pages.

9. Develop an evaluation plan. Have an evaluation and metrics plan in place prior to launch to determine if efforts are successful.
For example, it will be helpful to:

> • Determine how participation will be measured. Evaluation can include simple measures of user engagement (e.g. How many followers/fans/friends does the account have? How many users commented on recent posts?)

> • Take advantage of the analytic packages available on the social networking sites. These can be utilized to determine the number of people ("fans") participating in the activity and to observe how users engage with the site. For example, Facebook Insights are available to users (administrators) who maintain a page for an organization. Facebook Insights allow the administrator to see demographic information and fan interactions with the page over time.

> • Consider tracking the amount of traffic being driven to a website from an organization's Facebook page. If using an analytics tool for a website (such as Google Analytics or WebTrends), that tool will show the source of traffic to a page, and the number of users who are visitors coming via a link on the Facebook page.

> • Plan to evaluate with an online survey (through a tool such as SurveyMonkey) to measure user satisfaction, increases in knowledge due to the social networking page, or changes in behavior or attitudes.

CDC Best Practices: Twitter

1. Account set-up recommendations - Profile Name, Image and Biography
> *a. Profile name* - Each Twitter account has a unique profile name that describes the subject matter of the account, name of the organization or contains a keyword describing the nature of the organization. (e.g. CDC_eHealth, FluGov). The profile name should be short and concise (maximum 15 characters).

b. Biography - The biography is a 160-character description of the profile. This biographical statement should be the first post from a new profile.

c. Image – A logo or graphic that represents your organization or agency.

2. Keep content short and simple. CDC recommends writing tweets of 120 characters so that messages can easily be retweeted, (the practice of posting another user's tweet), without editing. If a tweet contains the maximum 140 characters, users who want to share your message by retweeting will need to edit the message to reduce the character count.

3. Provide more information with a shortened URL. If possible, provide a link back to your main website for more information. You can save space by using URLs that are shortened. Several websites are available that can help you: http://tinyurl.com or http://is.gd.

4. Promote your Twitter profile. Provide links to your Twitter profile on other communications materials that you have prepared, including both traditional and social media, and work with other Twitter profiles to build your audience base strategically.

5. Keep followers engaged. Setting a regular posting schedule will help engage followers.

6. Post other relevant content. Develop a strategy for retweeting posts from partners and followers.

7. Search Twitter for comments about your organization or health topic: You can use search.twitter.com to monitor Twitter. You can then "listen" to conversations about important health concerns, find messages about your organization and monitor how audiences are responding to messages.

8. Evaluate your efforts. Track your efforts and regularly review the number of followers, updates, retweets and mentions in Twitter. There are also a number of ways to monitor increased traffic to your website, as well as the "mentions" outside of Twitter on blogs, websites or articles.
With regular monitoring of Twitter efforts, it is easy to track increased traffic to your website generated by click-throughs of your links, changes in your followers, and the number of retweets of your messages. Many evaluation metrics for Twitter can be collected for little or no cost.

When evaluating Twitter activities, consider the following:
• Track click-throughs from your links: Website analytics software (such as Omniture Site Catalyst or Google Analytics), allows you to track increases in website traffic from Twitter by measuring how many followers click through from Twitter links back to your site.

• Analyze influence on Twitter: Account users may keep track of how many other users are "following" them and how many updates they have published over time. Retweets, @replies (or "at replies"), and other mentions of his or her Twitter username are tracked on a user's profile. An RSS feed can also be set up to track these search results.

• Analyze followers: Because Twitter is web-based, it may be possible to design an online survey (through a tool such as SurveyMonkey) to measure user satisfaction, increases in knowledge due to your profile, or changes in behavior or attitudes.