

Improving Community Engagement through Social Media

Strategies for Law Enforcement to Increase Transparency, Accessibility

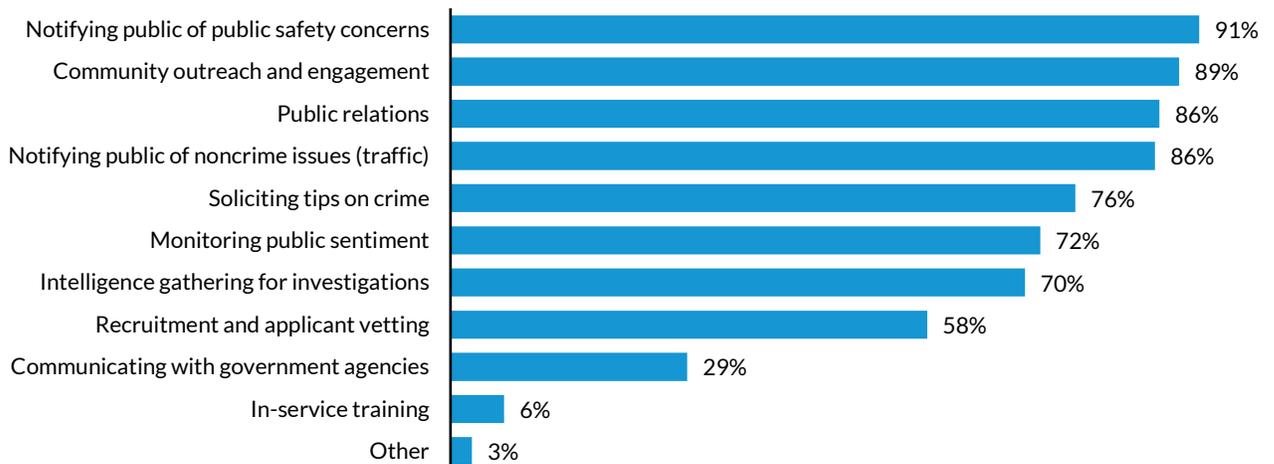
Emily Tiry, Ashlin Oglesby-Neal, and KiDeuk Kim

Want to learn how to use social media to build stronger relationships with your communities? We created a [guidebook](#) providing data-driven recommendations and step-by-step strategies for law enforcement agencies.

FOUR STEPS TO MORE EFFECTIVE SOCIAL MEDIA USE

- 1. Establish a baseline.** It is important to first understand how your agency currently uses social media. Creating this baseline helps with determining what works well and what needs to be changed. This involves examining:
 - The types of social media your agency uses (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn, Instagram).
 - What your agency uses social media for.
 - The type of content your agency posts. Both the topics and structure can vary widely. We found that most agency tweets fall into one of the following topic categories: PR and recruitment; weather and traffic; retweets; crime; replies to other users; and soliciting information. Structure refers to photos, videos, and external links.
 - How your agency manages social media. Agencies vary widely in their size and structure, and this often affects who maintains primary responsibility for managing the agency’s social media accounts, how much of their time they spend on social media, and whether content needs to be approved by someone else before posting.

Uses of Social Media



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Source: 2016 Law Enforcement Use of Social Media Survey.

2. **Set goals.** Once your agency has established a baseline for its social media activity, it can develop goals that summarize what it wants to achieve through its use of social media. Although there are many types of social media goals your agency could have, we focus on improving community engagement and transparency.
3. **Measure performance.** When developing goals, it is important to ensure that they are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and have a timeline. After your agency has developed goals for how it would like to improve its social media use, the next step is identifying and tracking the appropriate metrics to measure your agency's performance toward achieving those goals.
4. **Implement strategies for improvement.** Once your agency has identified the metrics it wants to use to track progress toward its social media goals, it should implement appropriate strategies to work toward those goals. The guidebook explores the following strategies:
 - » Develop relationships with community members and organizations that have large audiences
 - » Schedule posts for the beginning of the week when possible
 - » Include media such as photos and videos in your posts
 - » Regularly monitor social media mentions of your agency
 - » Routinely highlight officers at work and take part in existing social media events
 - » Implement these steps within your overall social media strategy

ADDITIONAL READING

Social Media Guidebook for Law Enforcement Agencies

Emily Tiry, Ashlin Oglesby-Neal, and KiDeuk Kim
<https://urbn.is/2WWbLtY>.

Law Enforcement Social Media Policies

Ashlin Oglesby-Neal and Chloe Warnberg <https://urbn.is/2GPfAf9>.

Public Perceptions of Police on Social Media

Ashlin Oglesby-Neal, Emily Tiry, and KiDeuk Kim <https://urbn.is/2SCyKMj>.

2016 Law Enforcement Use of Social Media Survey

KiDeuk Kim, Ashlin Oglesby-Neal, and Edward Mohr
<http://urbn.is/2gR9UpN>.

CASE STUDY: THE PALO ALTO POLICE DEPARTMENT

When the Palo Alto Police Department originally began developing its social media presence several years ago, they wanted to improve their relationship with the media, but they also ended up improving their online engagement with the community at large in the process.

For Captain Zach Perron, social media is about transparency and getting accurate information out to people as quickly as possible.

For this approach to work, the department needed to build its following to maximize the number of people getting their information and updates. Perron turned to strategies like humor to help him expand the department's audience. "All the humor that I use, the interplay with sports teams and things like that, it's all designed to get as many followers as we can."

But he didn't stop at just reacting to comments or questions as they come in. He also proactively started conversations by replying to tweets mentioning Palo Alto, thereby striking up conversations with users who had not followed the police department until then. This practice is highly consistent with the principles and tactics of traditional community policing, which can be broadly applied to social media.