



# ENGAGING SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS FOR HEALTH CAMPAIGNS

Social media allows organizations to communicate directly with their audience, but many organizations struggle to make themselves heard among the crowd of voices on social media. Health organizations are increasingly turning to individuals with a strong social media presence and followings to disseminate health campaigns and messages. Many individuals with strong social media followings are already advocates for their communities or a specific cause. Community advocates, or micro-influencers, can help your health campaign or messages stand out by delivering them through a trusted, influential voice.

## Creating a Plan

Community advocates can elevate your social media presence by disseminating your priority messages and engaging your desired audiences. Before engaging a community advocate on social media, you must first set your goals, identify your audience and platforms, and develop your key messages.

### 1. Set your budget.

As with any marketing activity, setting a budget is the first step in creating a plan to engage community advocates on social media. Compensation norms for social media advocates vary widely depending on the user's following and the types of content you want them to post. For most users with less than 500,000 followers, you can expect to pay between \$150 and \$5,000 for a short-form video (60 seconds or less, minimal production effort), and between \$50 and \$1,500 for a standard image post or social media story post. If you do not have funds to financially compensate community advocates, you can ask if they are willing to work pro bono. In this case, it may help to narrow your search to community advocates with personal ties to the subject on which you are working.

### 2. Set your goal.

Ask yourself what you want to achieve by engaging community advocates on social media. Do you want to educate your community about an issue? Publicize an event? Inspire your audience to take action? Your goal is the key to developing the rest of your plan.

### 3. Identify your audience and platforms.

Once you have your goal, you need to identify the group(s) of people you need to reach to achieve your goal. Depending on your goal, you may want to reach local high school students, parents and families, or seniors. Your audience will determine which platforms you need to use.

Pew Research Center's 2021 [Social Media Fact Sheet](#) provides in-depth statistics about social media platform usage among many demographic groups in the United States. Sprout Social keeps an [updated list](#) of user numbers and some limited demographic data on its website.

### 4. Develop key messages.

Your key messages will be the foundation for the content that your community advocates create and publish on your behalf. Before you begin selecting community advocates, you should know the core of what you want them to say. Your key messages should outline the core information your audience needs to receive in order to accomplish the goal you identified in step 2.

## Identifying and Engaging Community Advocates

### Community Advocate Discovery

Once you have identified your goal, audience, platforms, and key messages, you can begin the advocate discovery process. There are two basic ways to execute this process: offline discovery and online discovery.

Offline discovery involves generating a list of people who are known to be influential among your desired audience and then looking those people up online to determine whether they may be effective social media advocates. For instance, if you want to reach local young professionals, you may want to make a list of leaders of local networking groups or professional organizations. Once you have a list of potential advocates, you should look to see which people on your list have an active and established social media presence on the platforms you have selected. The advantage of this approach is that you will only spend time vetting potential advocates who are relevant to your audience and who are likely to be followed by members of your community. The drawbacks to this approach are that you need to know your audience fairly well or be able to research them in order to generate a list of potential advocates, and it may take several tries to find someone who has a substantial social media presence.

Online discovery flips this process: first you identify people with substantial social media influence, and then you vet them to determine whether they may be effective messengers for your desired audience. To find influential social media users, you will need to conduct a series of searches on the platforms you are planning to use, or you can use a tool like [HypeAuditor](#) (\$0+) or [Influence.co](#) (\$0+) to find potential advocates. The benefit of this approach is that it will be easier to identify potential advocates with large social media followings. However, you may need to sort through many potential advocates to find someone who is relevant to your audience and an appropriate messenger for your organization. When searching directly on social media platforms, try to generate a list of keywords and hashtags that are relevant to your audience and your key messages. Using location-based hashtags (#Virginia, #NYC) can help you narrow your search to your geographic community. You can identify other hashtags that are relevant to your audience or topic area by searching different hashtags directly on social media platforms, or by using a website like [hashtagify.me](#) (\$0+) to search for popular hashtags.

### Vetting Potential Community Advocates

The discovery process may generate a large list of potential advocates. To select the community advocate(s) you want to work with, you will need to create a list of criteria to use to evaluate each individual. This list will vary based on your organization, audience, and subject matter.

#### Consider

- Does the user's existing content align with your organization's mission and the key messages you want them to disseminate?
- Does the user publish high-quality content that would represent your organization well?
- Does the user's audience base align with the audience you want to reach?
- Does the user receive a lot of positive engagement on their existing content?
- How many followers does the user have?
- Are there any red flags on the user's profile (e.g., inappropriate language, discriminatory content, illegal content)?

### Mitigating Risks

Working with advocates comes with inherent risk. It is always possible that you will miss something while vetting an advocate's past, and you cannot control whether the advocate does something in the future that might negatively affect your organization's reputation and the advocate's effectiveness as a messenger. To mitigate these risks, you should proactively prepare a response plan. This plan should include potential scenarios with predetermined responses to be carried out if an issue arises. Different scenarios require different levels of response. For instance, a minor issue may cause your organization to simply halt any existing engagement with that advocate, while a major offense may require publishing a press release to disavow the advocate's actions.

## Approaching Community Advocates

Once you have selected the advocates you want to work with, you should reach out to them to gauge their interest in working with you. If the user is well-known and has created paid content in the past, their social media profile may include a contact email for business inquiries. If no contact information is listed, you may send them a direct message through the platform on which you want to work with them.

If you contact them through a social media account, you should send a short message that includes the organization you represent and a one- to two-sentence summary of the project you want to collaborate on. You should provide a contact email address and ask them if there is an email address you can use to send them additional information.

Your email to the potential advocate (or their business representation) should include a social media briefing document. The briefing document should outline the goals, audience, platform, and key messages you identified above. If you already have a designated budget for this project, you can include an initial offer of compensation or you can request that they send you a list of costs of their typical offerings.

## Content Creation, Publishing, and Promotion

### Content Creation

After coming to an agreement with the community advocate, you will work with them to create and schedule the content. This process can take a lot of different forms. At one end of the spectrum, your organization creates the social media content in its entirety and provides it to the community advocate for them to post on their social media channels at the designated time. At the other end of the spectrum, the advocate creates the content completely by themselves based only on the social media brief you provided. The most effective engagements typically fall somewhere in the middle, with your organization collaborating with the advocate to create content that is authentic to the advocate and in alignment with your organization's goals, key messages, and quality standards.

At minimum, you should require three stages of review:

1. Review the content plan (e.g., video script, photo description) prior to the content being created.
2. Review the finished content prior to it being published.
3. Review the content the moment it goes live to ensure that everything was published the way it was intended.

### Compliance With Social Media Disclosure

The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) requires that users disclose all sponsored social media content. Review the [FTC brochure](#) for full guidelines for social media users, including when and how to disclose sponsorship. You should ensure that your community advocate understands and complies with these requirements. While these regulations primarily cover paid advertising, it is typically best for the advocate to disclose their relationship with your organization even if they are providing their services pro bono.

### Content Timing

You should plan for the community advocate's content to be published on a day and time that makes sense for your audience and benefits your organization. For instance, if your goal is to encourage community members to call a phone number that is only staffed during business hours, you should make sure that the post goes out early in the day and early in the week. Most social media posts have a lifespan of about 30 minutes (i.e., X/Twitter) to 36 hours (i.e., Instagram). This means that if the post doesn't gain traction in that window, it is unlikely to pick up momentum later. You do not want to waste that important window of time when your audience is not likely to engage with your content.

## Evaluating Success

As with any social media activity, your goals will determine the metrics you use to evaluate content performance. If your goal is to raise awareness, you should prioritize reach and impressions. If your goal is to generate interest and community engagement, look to comments and other engagements. If your goal is related to link clicks or another website-based action, consider giving your community advocate a unique link to track the number of people who use that link. You can create a tracked link using URL parameters if you already use a website analytics platform like Google Analytics or Adobe Analytics. If not, consider using a link shortener like [Bitly](#) to create a trackable, shortened link.

When discussing the terms of your partnership at the onset of the collaboration, make sure to include a requirement that the community advocate share the sponsored content's analytics at a designated time after posting (e.g., two weeks after the last post is published). These analytics will include more information about the content's performance than you are able to see publicly. If possible, schedule a short meeting with the advocate to discuss how the collaboration went, what they would want to do differently next time, and any other lessons learned to improve any future partnerships with community advocates.