

# Look Before You Leap

Social media is transforming the way people obtain and share information. As more and more advocacy organizations begin to utilize social media as a means of connecting with their audiences, they will need ways to evaluate the effectiveness of these new outreach tools.

If recent presentations given by TCEC and others at the American Evaluation Association conference earlier this month were any indication, evaluators everywhere are looking for guidance about how to evaluate social media.

While lots of different metrics are being suggested, there is as of yet no agreement about which are the best measures for reach, influence and engagement. What *is* clear is that in order to evaluate the effectiveness of any social media platform, a media plan must first be in place.

Too many organizations dive into using social media before they have any real plan for what they want out of it. For evaluators, that's like just brainstorming a list of questions before thinking about the purpose, sample population and indicators (or data points) of a survey. And as we all know, that can lead to problems!



Developing a social media communication plan is similar to the end-use strategizing process we recommend for survey design. The plan should define:

- what your organization hopes to achieve through social media
- which target audiences you are trying to reach
- what kind of content you want to convey
- how much staff time and resources you have available
- which social media platform(s) will best serve your needs
- what are the benchmarks of success for your social media campaign

Once all of this has been defined, *then* you are ready to come up with specific metrics or measures for evaluating your social media presence.

Obviously, there is a whole lot more to this. We'll be sharing ideas on this topic in future newsletters, plus we are collaborating with CYAN and others to develop a "how-to" manual on social media (but that won't be available until sometime next year). In the meantime if you have questions about using or evaluating social media, contact Amelia Silbert-Geiger at [CYAN](#) or Robin Kipke at [TCEC](#).

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