

Foundations Need to Engage in a Networked, Digital World

Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, and YouTube are the tip of an increasingly complex social media environment that provides more connectivity than ever before. While there are many different ways foundations can engage in this environment – from being a quiet listener to being an out-front thought leader – it seems opting out is no longer an option.

“You can’t be a good civic leader if you’re not in this environment,” said Lee Rainie, Director of the Internet and American Life Project for the Pew Research Center. Rainie and other social media experts shared their thoughts on how foundations can better understand and get engaged in a networked, digital world during a special half-day Philanthropy Southwest session.

Stephanie Rudat, an international speaker and trainer, noted that a lot of foundations get a social media presence in “reverse order.” They come to recognize that people are having a conversation about the foundation on social media channels, so they quickly get set up and try to catch up.

Regardless of whether your entry is proactive or reactive, it’s best to begin by asking your most important audiences – grantees, nonprofit leaders, and other key partners – where they get their information and start your engagement there. It’s also helpful to know that Facebook is the most popular channel, being used by 72% of Internet-users, followed by Instagram at 28% and Twitter at 23%. As well, more women engage through social media than men, and there remains an age difference, with the younger crowd being more comfortable in the social media world.

Another consideration is how social media can help with the specific work that you do. Funders are effectively using social media platforms to motivate their communities to donate, tell their stories in new ways, and take action on important issues aligned with their philanthropic mission.

For example, said Rudat, you can use Twitter to share snippets of information about who you are and what you’re up to. You can have active conversations, be a broadcaster, or just listen. Facebook provides a good platform from which you can increase thought leadership, cross-promote information, and show gratitude.

Don’t get bogged down by the complexity of the social media environment, said Rainie, just find an entry point. “There’s no playbook. We’re all still figuring it out.”

“There is a lot of ‘how-to’ and ‘why’ information available online and through organizations such as the [Knight Digital Media Center](#),” said Rudat. “These resources explain how social media can help you to expand your reach, humanize your brand, reinforce your expertise, and amplify your work.” Learn more and get engaged!