Social media, the political sphere, and your voice

Social media can be used as an outlet for sharing fun videos and photos with your friends, but it can also be used for advocacy work. And the best part? Anyone can participate in this kind of activism from virtually anywhere with an internet connection.

Historically, it has been difficult for members of Congress to know, in real-time, what issues their constituents care about. With the development and popularity of social media, it has never been easier. In addition to constituents communicating their interests, members of Congress can also share information about votes and issues almost instantly! In a study done by the Congressional Management Foundation, 76% of congressional staffers said social media allows lawmakers’ offices to have “more meaningful interactions” with constituents. Additionally, 70% said platforms like Twitter and Facebook made their member or senator “more accountable” to the people they are representing while in Washington.

Social media advocacy is an extension of our lobbying efforts. Policy makers need to hear your voice. We at FCNL want you to have the skills to be an advocate on any platform; from Facebook and Instagram to Twitter, we hope this toolkit will give you the resources you need.

For peace and justice,

The Friends Committee on National Legislation
A Quaker Lobby in the Public Interest
Getting started

At FCNL our work depends upon your grassroots advocacy. The people with the most influence on a member of Congress are their constituents. This is especially true when those constituents are persistent and engaged. Our hope is that this toolkit will allow you to accomplish this with ease. Social media is a tool you can use all year round from anywhere. Even when you cannot schedule a lobby visit spur of the moment, you have a voice and we want to empower you to use it to help us steer U.S policies toward peace and justice.

According to data from the Huffington Post, in 2016, 90% of the U.S. House and 100% of the U.S. Senate members have Twitter accounts. While some members of Congress are likely to be more active than others on social media, at minimum their staff should be monitoring it and will still see your comments and hear your message.

Social media not only enables you to contact policy-makers directly; it offers other advantages. Social media can help you share your concerns with your existing network of friends, family, and coworkers. It can be a means of raising awareness on a policy issue or for rallying support. Anyone can do social media advocacy, and your individual action multiplied by that of other’s in FCNL’s network and in your network, has the potential to make a huge difference.

First steps

1. Find out what forms of social media your member of Congress is using and follow them on those given platforms to receive updates on upcoming legislation. This information can be obtained through a simple Google search.
2. Consider what platforms you may want to use to convey your message. Is it something that is happening right now (Twitter)? Is it something you have an interesting visual component for (Instagram)? Or do you want to reach your member of Congress while also expanding your network (Facebook)?

Hashtag → a word or phrase preceded by a pound sign or hash (#) used to identify messages, movements, or a specific topic.
Steps to start your advocacy

1. Research
Your post will be most effective if you ask your member of Congress to take a single defined action. You can do this by including a bill number of policy position in your post (e.g. H.R. 103). You can always get in touch with our lobbyist on the issue you care about to find out the best bill to lobby for right now by emailing FCNL support@fcnl.org.

2. Connect
In a study done by the Huffington Post, Congressional staff said that the type of social media advocacy that is most influential on their bosses were when multiple constituents commented on the same post. In other words, the more engagement, the merrier! You can boost engagement by implementing widely used hashtags relevant to the bill you are lobbying for or against (e.g. #UnlockJustice for sentencing reform legislation). This tool increases your chances of reaching your member of Congress, and allows you to connect with others who are concerned with the same issues as you are. There is strength in numbers!

3. Share
Increase your post’s chances of being noticed by sharing multiple times, on multiple social media platforms over a few days. Keep each post unique and constructive so your member of Congress does not think your posts are spam!

4. Follow up
Social media is even more powerful when paired with other forms of advocacy. It is imperative that you continue to reach out to your members of Congress through email, phone calls, letters, and most importantly in person meetings! See our Advocacy Starter Kit for helpful guidance.

5. Repeat
Because of the easy accessibility of social media you can continue this process of reaching out to your members of Congress. The more you do, and the more you engage your network in constructive conversations about your advocacy, the more likely you are to get a response from law makers. If you are able to complement your social media advocacy with lobby visits, even better.

Thank them when they get it right!
These techniques aren’t only useful when you want your member of Congress to do something, you can also use it to thank them! This is an easy way not only to remind them that you are paying attention to their actions on the Hill, but also to help them gauge where their constituency is on issues such as gun control or immigration. This has the potential to encourage similar policy decisions in the future.
**Twitter:**
Advocacy in 140 characters! Engaging policy-makers in real-time.

Twitter can be a highly effective way of engaging members of Congress. It lets you give immediate feedback, and it’s often monitored right up until the moment the votes are cast. But most advocacy tweets never reach the decision maker. Here’s how to make sure your tweets are a useful part of your advocacy toolkit.

1. **Tag** the appropriate policy/decision makers.
2. **Identify yourself.** As a constituent your voice matters a lot to your policy makers! e.g. Emily from PA-15 (State + District)
3. **ASK!** Specific policy, bill number, give details!
4. **Use relevant hashtags.** Which campaign are you referencing? #LoveThyNeighbor? #UnlockJustice?
5. Post!

**Draft your advocacy tweet below:**

Justa User @sampleuser123

Hoping @SenToomey will support S2551 to prevent atrocities and genocide.
I'm a constit from PA-15 with @fcnl #pivot2peace
Facebook

Addressing your member of Congress and network (without a character limit).

Facebook is an effective tool because it allows users to go directly to a member of Congress’ page and interact one-on-one with them about important issues by sending them private messages, posting on their walls, or tagging them in a post on your own wall. It also is a great way to engage people who are already in your network on the issues you care about.

![Image of Justa User]

**Justa User**
Saturday at 2:40 pm

We have the opportunity to make “never again” a promise we can keep. @SenToomey I am a constituent from PA-15 and I believe we need all voices at the table — I urge you to support the Genocide and Atrocities Prevention Act (S2551) and to take a stand for peace. #Pivot2Peace

1. **Tag** appropriate policy/decision makers
2. **Identify yourself.** As a constituent your voice matters a lot to your policy makers! e.g. Emily from PA-15 (State + District)
3. **ASK!** On Facebook you can be more detail oriented because there is no character limit like Twitter. This means you can discuss the issue or policy in depth and make it personal. How would this policy affect you or your community?
4. **Use relevant hashtags**, expand your audience.
5. Post!
6. You also have the option of commenting directly on the post of a representative so long as it is relevant. This is critical so that you are not seen as spam and thus dismissed

**Draft your advocacy post below:**

![Facebook status interface]

*Friends Committee on National Legislation*

245 2nd Street NE, Washington, DC 20002 *(800) 630-1330* FCNL.ORG
Instagram
A picture is worth a thousand words!

Instagram is a great advocacy tool because it gives your advocacy a creative edge. You can use your visuals to identify yourself, your organization, or your issue.

1. **Tag** the appropriate policy makers
2. **Identify yourself** as a constituent (someone they should/have to listen to)
3. **ASK!** Specific policy, bill number, give details. e.g. Emily from PA-15 (State + District)
4. **Use relevant hashtags** to expand your audience!
5. Make it visually interesting! This is important on Instagram because it is so image oriented.

---

**Draft your advocacy gram:**

---

---
Facebook Live

Members of Congress participating in social media have the ability to communicate information about votes and issues to their constituents in real-time. The instantaneous nature of exchange is most clearly demonstrated when they utilize Facebook Live, a function which allows users to stream live video to their followers. When using Live, members of Congress can respond to their constituents' questions and create a space for discussion between them and their constituents. The best way to know about these opportunities is to follow your policy makers and to “Live Subscribe” to their pages so that you will be notified when they go live.

When live streaming, your representative will be able to see in real-time your comments and reactions. This is a great opportunity to ask questions and get answers.

Snapchat

Some members of Congress have recently taken to Snapchat, arguably one of the fastest growing social platforms. The app and its characteristic disappearing messages was at first used simply for trading selfies but now is a platform which has hundreds of thousands of users including presidential candidates and some members of Congress. Snapchat does not allow for users to address their member of Congress directly, but it does allow members to share updates and news with their constituents. Snapchat is not as widely used by members of Congress as other platforms such as Twitter or Facebook, but a simple google search should reveal whether your member is active on the app or not!
The Friends Committee on National Legislation is a Quaker lobby in the public interest.

We promote just, peaceful and equitable policies in the U.S. government. Our influence in Washington stems from the integrity of our arguments and the strength of our grassroots network.