

Online Communications for Friends of National Parks

BUILDING A COMMUNITY OF SUPPORTERS THROUGH DIGITAL CHANNELS

At a time when conversations are increasingly held online and mobile devices make a world of information accessible in the palm of your hand, philanthropic park partners are well served by cultivating an online community of potential visitors, volunteers, and donors. Inexpensive, user-friendly online tools are available to help drive awareness about your work and provide convenient avenues of communication with a variety of audiences. Utilizing these digital channels requires creativity, compelling storytelling, and engaging in genuine conversations with community members. If you can dedicate the time, these digital channels can become highly effective tools [in support of your mission](#).

Website

Your website should be your central hub of information, it is the online home you want to invite your community to visit. Regardless of which other tools you choose to employ, they should point people back to the site to learn more about your organization and your work. By regularly posting new and relevant information – either through event calendars, blog posts, or other relevant pages on your site – your online community will learn to keep coming back to get the latest.

***Tip:** High-quality photos, illustrations, and videos enhance a visitor’s experience to your website. Visually-compelling pages on your site will not only compel visitors to scroll down once they land on a page, but will encourage them to click around the site to see more.*

E-Newsletters

Electronic newsletters can be an effective tool for sharing detailed information with a large audience of followers. Once you are in the habit of sending out updates on a regular schedule, your supporters will come to look forward to hearing from you about what events, news, and donor opportunities are on deck. Newsletters are also a great place to share stories, celebrate successes, and recognize great volunteers. Sites like [Constant Contact](#), [Mail Chimp](#), and [Emma](#) provide easy templates that make the process of setting up a regularly-distributed newsletter simple.

***Tip:** Ensure your newsletter is visually interesting and can be easily scanned. As with most digital channels, you are competing with a tremendous volume of communications from other organizations and brands. A striking newsletter will stand out and intrigue readers.*

Facebook

A ubiquitous name in the social media landscape, [Facebook](#) is one of the biggest channels you can consider employing in your online strategy. The platform is ideal for sharing relevant links, events, photos, and videos (including live streams). It is also one of the most versatile and sophisticated channels for both organic and paid outreach to your community. Inspire participation from followers by asking questions, inviting them to share your posts with their friends and family, and by facilitating conversations among them about their park experiences.

For ideas about how to best use tools like these to support the work of your organization, contact the Community Partnerships team at the National Park Foundation directly.

Tip: Most Facebook users passively scroll through their newsfeeds. Make your visual so compelling people stop to look at it, draw them in by making your accompanying copy succinct and engaging, and then give them an action to take (e.g. share, click to learn more, etc.).

Twitter

[Twitter](#) allows you to share frequent updates and easily engage with other Twitter users, including the [National Park Foundation](#) and [National Park Service](#). In 140 characters, you can tease website content, live-tweet events, share pictures, stream live videos, and reply to questions from followers. By incorporating hashtags into your tweets (e.g. #FindYourPark), you can connect to other conversations happening around Twitter and increase the likelihood that you will be found by new followers looking for related content. Participating in [Twitter Chats](#) is another great way to help other users discover your handle, share resources on your website, or drum up excitement about events.

Tip: The lifespan of a tweet is very short. Your post will only appear in a timeline for about 18-24 minutes before it gets pushed too far down a timeline by other tweets, so tweet early and tweet often. Using a [social media management tool](#) allows you to schedule tweets throughout the day.

Additional Channels

Many other digital channels exist and can be employed in support of your mission and communications strategy like [Instagram](#), [Tumblr](#), [Snapchat](#), [YouTube](#), [Pinterest](#), [Medium](#), [Reddit](#), and so on. Some do not drive traffic to the website the same way others can; some emphasize on-platform engagement by sharing live updates, pictures, and short-form videos. They all, however, do offer more relevant ways to engage younger audiences.

If your organization is looking to start or strengthen its presence online, start by exercising the basics using some of the channels shared above. The mechanics of each channel may vary, but the core elements remain the same: be creative, share great content, and be social. Doing so will garner interest and engagement by new and existing members of your online community of supporters.

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