



# The State Of Social Media In The Public Sector 2022



# INTRODUCTION



While government agencies and school districts had already been working on “going digital” long before the global COVID-19 pandemic, the lockdowns and closures made it necessary to accelerate the move. And while 2022 saw restrictions on in-person interactions largely lifted, many embraced the change to online interactions, further cementing social media as a primary communication tool. Now more than ever, social media is one of the first places community members look for information and updates from their government, schools, and other public institutions.

The maturity of social media as a communication channel is reflected in the level of experience of this year’s survey respondents. Roughly 26% reported ten years or more using social media as part of their regular responsibilities, up almost 16% year-over-year (YoY). It’s a good thing, too, as that experience is needed to deal with the myriad of challenges facing today’s communicators, including controversial topics, online criticism, and misinformation. The polarized political climate often turned comment sections into battlegrounds, with

public communicators caught in the middle, trying to figure out how best to referee it all while being mindful of First Amendment restrictions and public records laws.

Despite this, the opportunities of social media and its ability to amplify and scale messaging at lightning speed outweigh the challenges. While many communicators have certainly had moments of wanting to just shut it down, few take this drastic step because the benefits are measurable and real. And as the platforms continue to evolve, so do the opportunities to grow and engage new audiences in new ways. For example, TikTok’s popularity accelerated with both users and public communicators last year, and survey respondents expressed excitement and trepidation about creating content for the platform.

One thing is for sure, it’s a busy but rewarding time to be a public communicator, and even the most seasoned professionals are learning every day. So we asked for your feedback again this year to help your peers learn from your experience. And roughly 700 of you answered,

sharing insights into the successes and struggles you’ve had growing your platforms and engagement. You’re finding new ways to represent and humanize your organizations and gain trust with your community, which you’ll see in this report. With your guidance, we hope other public agencies and school districts can better set themselves up for success in the coming years.



**Alix Bowman**  
*VP of Customer  
for Optimere*

We’re happy to present the  
**2022 State of Social Media in  
the Public Sector Report!**



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# WHO DID WE TALK TO?



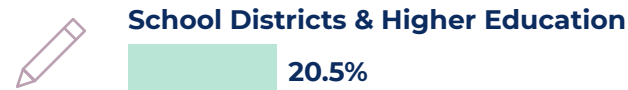
This year, communicators from more than 700 government agencies, police departments, and school districts responded to our survey on the State of Social Media in the Public Sector. The respondents answered questions on how their organizations use social media, the challenges they've faced, and the successful tactics they've found. With this report, we aim to help you in your role as a public communicator to manage your time better, mitigate

risk, and achieve sustainable, measurable success. Most of all, we want to provide you with factual data from your peers that can help you highlight the value of social media to others in your organization and demonstrate the need to support this crucial channel fully in your communication strategy.

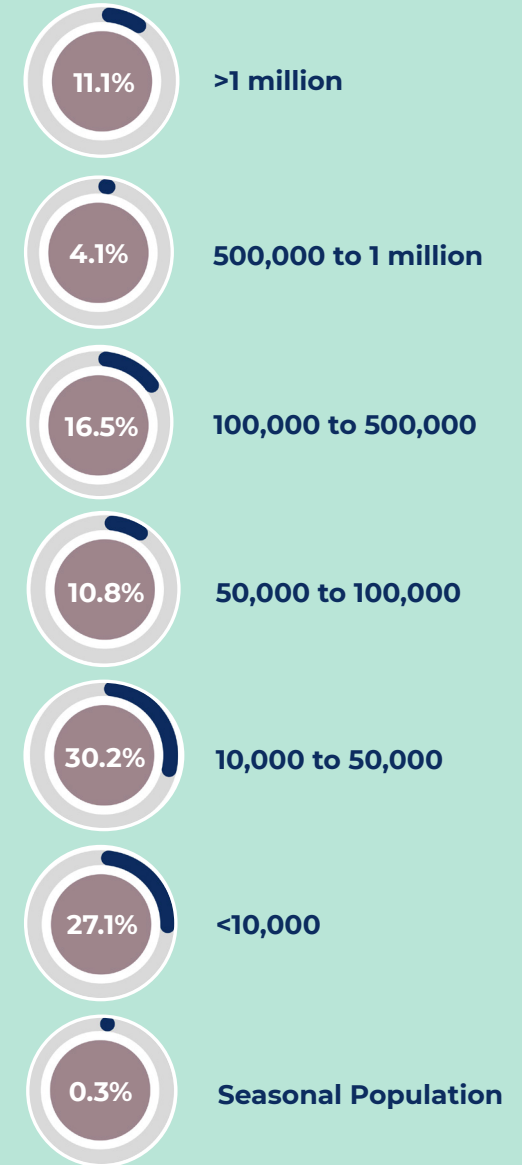


For full methodology, refer to page 34

## Who Did We Talk To?



## Populations Served:



# WHY BEING ACTIVE ON SOCIAL MEDIA IS MANDATORY

The “everything virtual” culture brought on by the pandemic has made social media and websites essential communication tools for agencies to serve efficiently, scale affordably, and adapt quickly. Social media is the best (and sometimes the only) place for agencies and school districts to build public awareness, gain support for initiatives, and communicate with their community during a crisis. We’ve seen the past few years plagued with global and local crises. When events like these occur, people turn to social media to seek information, keep up with the latest news and connect with their community.

But social media can also quickly accelerate the spread of misinformation. In fact, according to a 2020 Statista survey<sup>1</sup>, almost 50% of US adults saw fake news during the COVID-19 pandemic, and 70% said it caused a great deal of confusion. To counteract this, government agencies and school districts invest in social media to help them share accurate and timely information, as well as to identify misinformation and respond accordingly. This is especially important as citizens look to government social media accounts as one of the first places to provide them with updates during a crisis. But the investment in social media needs to start long before the crisis begins, so people will already know where to

turn for information when times get difficult. These days, most news is national in scope and editorial control, so public agencies and school districts have to be their own journalists and use social media to tell their local stories. When we asked survey respondents how their public entity currently uses social media, **the majority of respondents leverage social media for citizen engagement (91%), with critical response communications following closely behind (72.3%).**

But keeping the community informed isn't the only benefit social media offers the public sector. These platforms have also helped public agencies and school districts increase enrollment and staffing, which is why more than half of the respondents said they also use social media for employer branding and recruitment. And as social media becomes the first place most citizens go to for information, more than half of the respondents also indicated using social media for customer care and service.

## Citizen Engagement



## Critical Response Communications



## Employer Branding & Recruiting



## Customer Care/Service



# SOCIAL MEDIA ADOPTION & PRACTICE

## Social Media Has Been a Regular Responsibility for Public Communicators for Years

“

It's how we communicate because everyone's on social media at this point,” said Natalie Bednarz, digital communications supervisor at the City of Orlando, Florida. “It has become the voice of the city.

”

Most public agencies and school districts have established a solid presence online, which is reflected in the **majority of respondents (26.2%) claiming they've been using social media for over ten years.** But just having a presence isn't always enough. Without proper training and best practices, it's easy to lose control of the narrative. This section will discuss some of the challenges of social media and the strategies public communicators are adopting to get the most out of their online presence.

## Years Using Social Media

1.5%

1 year or less

4%

1-2 years

23.4%

3-5 years

24.7%

5-7 years

20.2%

7-9 years

26.2%

10+ years

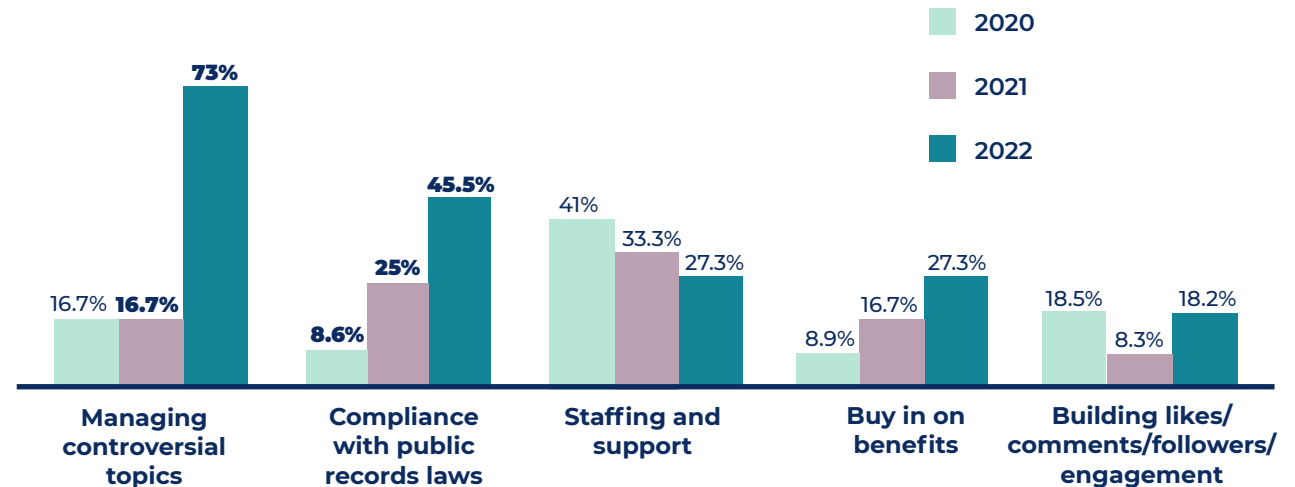


## Challenges To Adoption

While social media is clearly necessary for modern communication, that doesn't mean it's always easy to adopt. One of the most revealing questions in the survey asked, "What is the biggest challenge to social media adoption by your district or agency?" **Managing controversial topics skyrocketed from previous years, increasing 57% from a steady 16.7% in 2020 and 2021. Compliance with public records laws also increased by 20.5% year-over-year (YoY).** This data reveals that agencies and districts understand social media is a necessary tool for communication and one they need to manage with compliance in mind. It also suggests that there is still a lack of awareness around the resources to support an effective strategy.

As agencies and districts increased their online presence and activity on social media, they discovered a correlated increase in social media-related lawsuits. This could explain the rising concern over managing controversial topics and remaining compliant and also contribute to trouble getting buy-in on the benefits of social media, which slightly increased over the year. Agencies and districts can be sued over First Amendment violations like unlawfully blocking someone or deleting comments. They can also be sued over records compliance if they are not archiving social media content and are unable to answer a request for social media records.

## The Biggest Challenge to Social Media Adoption by Agencies and Districts



**57%**

**YoY increase in concern about managing controversial topics & a 20.5% YoY increase in concern about remaining in compliance with public records laws, which has risen steadily over the past three years.**

Caution is wise, and compliance concerns are serious. However, the lesson of these lawsuits isn't to get off social media entirely. Instead, government communicators should focus on having a consistent policy and training for everyone with access to your district or agency's social media. There is also a clear need for social media archiving tools and centralized

oversight of accounts, especially for elected officials. Public records law, personal and professional account separation, digital record policies, open meetings law, and campaigning on municipal pages can complicate social media use for public communicators. We will cover more trends in policy and training later in this report.

# Preferred Platforms



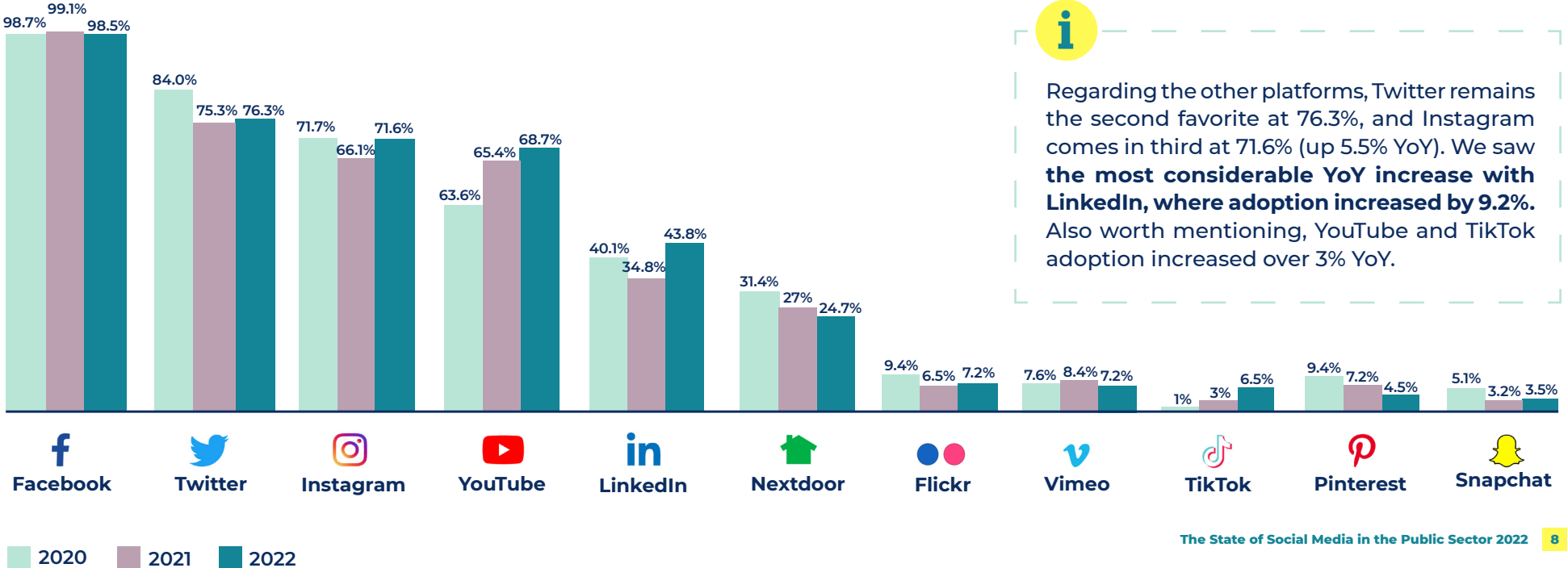
Social media, from my perspective, is Facebook,” explained Kim Kaufman, assistant manager of Swetara Township, PA. “That’s where everyone expects you to be.



For the past three years, Facebook has remained the most widely used social media platform by government entities and school districts. And it was no different this year, with **98.5% of respondents using Facebook**. In addition to being the platform with the greatest reach overall, Facebook offers greater flexibility in content posting options. With no character limit and fewer restrictions on the type of content that can be shared, communicators can get their entire message across and leave less to interpretation.

“You can include links, which you can’t do on Instagram,” said Sara Rodriguez, Senior Public Information Specialist at Riverside University Health System. “You can do videos which are tough on Twitter and Instagram. You can post jobs on Facebook, which you can do on LinkedIn, but you can’t do much else on LinkedIn. You can do pictures, video updates, blog posts, links, and in one way or another, a lot of the other platforms are limited in what you can share.”

## Agencies And School Districts Still Can’t Live Without Facebook



Regarding the other platforms, Twitter remains the second favorite at 76.3%, and Instagram comes in third at 71.6% (up 5.5% YoY). We saw **the most considerable YoY increase with LinkedIn, where adoption increased by 9.2%**. Also worth mentioning, YouTube and TikTok adoption increased over 3% YoY.





## Where the Students Are

### How vital are your social channels in communicating with your parents and students?

**93.43% of respondents in education said that social media is essential to their communication with parents and students.** Respondents also found social media important for engagement (76%), critical response (61%), and employer branding & recruitment (54%) for their school district.

93.43% of EDU survey respondents said they use social media to communicate with parents and students. Parents are easy to find on social media platforms, but what's the best platform

to reach students? We turned to Statista to dig into platform demographics.

Only 5.6% of Facebook users fall into the 13-17 age range<sup>2</sup>, which makes it challenging to use to communicate with students. Twitter isn't much better at 6.6%<sup>3</sup>. These platforms skew slightly older, so they're great for reaching parents.

Instagram has slightly more 13-17 users at 8.9%, which isn't much higher. It does present an opportunity for higher ed institutions. 30.2% of Instagram users are 18-24<sup>4</sup>; communicators at public colleges and universities may wish to focus on this platform to reach students. Instagram adoption in EDU is slightly

behind public communicators overall (69.34% vs. 71.6%), so there's an opportunity to increase reach.

TikTok's user base is the youngest, with 25% of users between 10 and 19<sup>5</sup>. While this makes it the best place to reach students, there are regulatory issues with TikTok that could complicate adoption for your district. For example, TikTok cannot currently be archived automatically by any social media archiving solution, meaning any content or comment may be lost forever if deleted or edited, leaving your organization at risk of not meeting public records laws.



# The Most and Least Valuable Platforms

Respondents were asked which platform they found least valuable, meaning the platform on which they had the most trouble with engagement. **30.2% of respondents said they had the most trouble with engagement on Twitter**, followed by Instagram (14.1%) and LinkedIn (10.6%). Twitter generally works best for politicians and agencies distributing real-time, short-lived information.

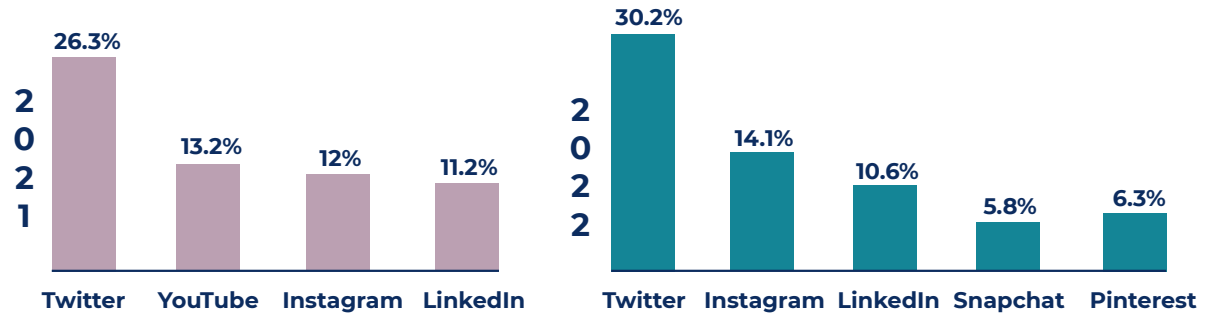


**TIP!**

## Instagram Engagement

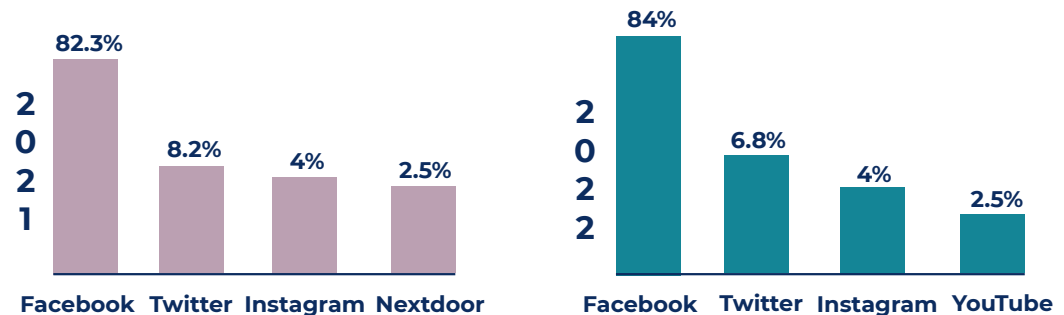
“For Instagram stories, we focus on the here and now, like what’s giving people that ‘FOMO’ (fear of missing out) feeling. What are we doing now? Where should I have been? And then in terms of the feed, we use that more as a place to showcase all the diversity and things you can do in the city.” — Natalie Bednarz, digital communications supervisor at the City of Orlando, Florida.

## The Least Valuable Platforms



More agencies and school districts are starting to see the value in YouTube but have doubts about the value of Twitter.

## The Most Valuable Platforms if Agencies & School Districts Could Only Be On One



Last year, YouTube did not make the top four list of platforms that agencies and districts found most valuable. This year, the numbers increased as it moved up to secure the fourth spot.



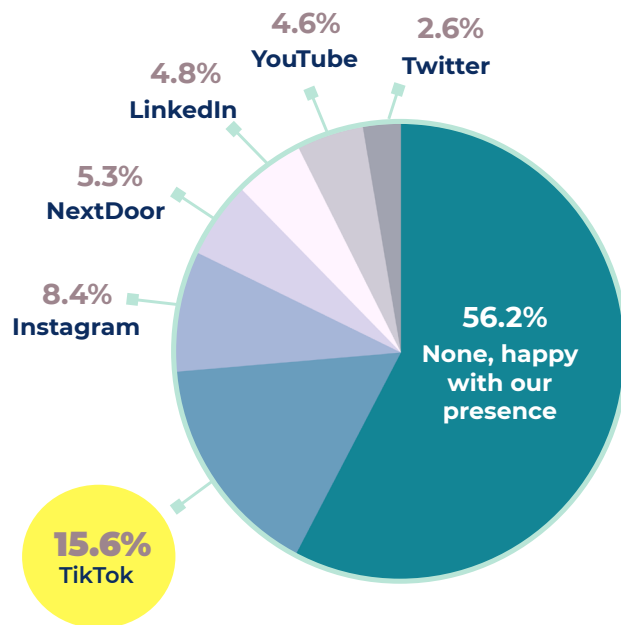
It should be no surprise that the overwhelming majority of all respondents (84%) agreed that Facebook remains their most valuable platform. This makes sense, as Facebook is the world's most active social media platform with 2.936 billion monthly active users and 1.960 billion daily active users as of April of this year, according to datareportal<sup>6</sup>. And the U.S. makes up a significant portion of those users. Statista<sup>7</sup> shows 239 million users on Facebook in the United States, which is up six million users from last year. That's a lot of people potentially visiting your pages!

We saw an increase in respondents who found YouTube more valuable compared to last year. This could speak to the overall shift to video that we're seeing as video marketing continues to dominate the social media industry. YouTube remains the second largest search engine and is expected to hit 210 million users in the US this year, according to

SEMrush statistics<sup>8</sup>. Sharing videos is a great way to reach and engage communities. In the U.S., 62% of users access the video platform daily, and 99% of its users are also on other social media platforms, according to a recent Hootsuite report<sup>9</sup>, making YouTube a popular platform to target and reach your audience.

While the present features Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, the future may very well be on TikTok. The mobile application, which features short videos, launched in September 2016 but gained traction with younger populations throughout the pandemic. When asked about launching future networks at the agency or district level, communicators said they are looking to TikTok, **with 15.6% of respondents stating TikTok is the next platform they plan to launch**, followed by Instagram (8.4%) and Nextdoor (5.3%).

## The Next Platform Agencies & Districts Plan to Launch



TikTok saw a

**10.1%**

YoY increase of respondents planning to launch the platform next

This new network may require a different skill set from communicators. "I think for governments to do TikTok well, they have to understand that you have to be self-aware and willing to be irreverent and poke fun at yourself," said Warren Kagarise, Digital Engagement Manager of King County, Washington. "So where on something like Instagram, you can excel by sharing beautiful content. On TikTok, you have to have a sense of humor."

# The People Behind the Profiles

There's a misconception that social media is easy to manage professionally because so many of us use social media so often in our personal lives. But managing social media for a public agency or school district isn't the same as managing your personal profiles. Public communicators are responsible for building a branded presence, continuously creating compelling content, responding to questions and messages, engaging with other people and content, and managing hot topics. And public communicators have to do this in a way that meets overall communications standards and furthers the goals of their agency or school district.

For most public sector communicators, social media isn't even their primary responsibility but just a part of their overall role. **Most respondents (68.7%) work on a team of one to three people.** And these teams are small but mighty –

**86.5%** are running multiple social media accounts for their entities, with 36% running six or more accounts!



## The Number of People Directly Responsible for Posting to Official Social Media Pages

2022



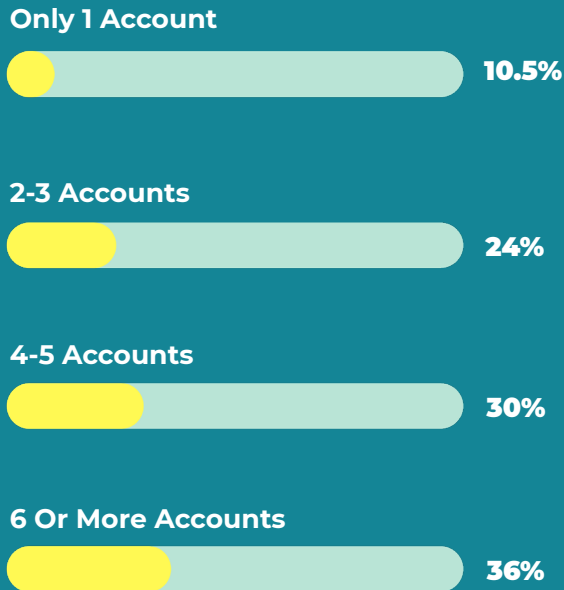
Previous Years



Rarely are communicators managing only one account, and there's always more than one page per account to wrangle. These 24/7 networks never take a break, which means communicators face a constant stream of comments, messages, and posts that they need to manage and moderate across different platforms. Only 10.5% of respondents manage one account, a slight decrease from last year. Most respondents (36%) manage six or more accounts for their agency or school district, followed by 30% of respondents managing four to five accounts.



## How Many Social Media Accounts Do Agencies & School Districts Have?



With so many accounts and pages to manage, contributors need training on formal policy and comment moderation. Training helps social media contributors understand how to interact with community members and keep messaging consistent and appropriate. Surprisingly, when asked about training for employees responsible for posting to official social media pages, **over 51% of respondents said there was no training.**

## Does Your Public Entity Offer Training For Employees Directly Responsible For Posting To Official Social Media Pages?



**79.2%** of agencies & districts don't have training or don't require it.

# Talking in Class



EDU respondents are a chatty bunch, posting more often than other public communicators. **41.61% in EDU post two or more times a day**, compared with just 22.2% of all survey respondents. School communicators have a lot to share: announcements and policy updates, schedules and events, and especially news on student activities and achievements.

Sharing information and connecting with community members at this rate may also be due to the nature of their primary audience – parents. Parents are voracious regarding information, stories, and photos of their children. But more posts can be a double-edged sword: it keeps followers engaged but can make you vulnerable to going viral for the wrong reasons.

Everyone wants to avoid First Amendment violations and controversial or tone-deaf posts and comments. One step schools and districts can take as a safeguard is to institute training for account contributors. Only about 21% of EDU respondents and 21% of all respondents said they currently have mandatory social media training. When the online behavior guidelines are unclear to contributors, they're more likely to make a mistake. And mistakes can be costly, potentially resulting in lawsuits or reduced enrollment.



## How, When, & What to Post

While acknowledging comments and answering questions is important, starting the conversation and providing the information is also paramount. **63.2% of respondents say they post at least daily**, which helps keep their agency in the conversation and active on social media. By providing easy access to information through social media, governments are more accessible than ever to those they serve and, in many cases, have become even more approachable.

“The amount of information we’re able to get out quickly has grown exponentially,” said Kim Kaufmann of Swetara Township, PA. “People can find information that typically they would have had to call 15, 20 different people to get the right piece of information maybe. I think access to information makes the government real and much less imposing to folks.”

Often, basic information like garbage collection, holidays, and other community events are shared on social media. But there are also times when accounts share important life-saving information and need to reach as broad an audience as possible in the shortest amount of time. That was the case many times throughout the height of the COVID-19 pandemic.

## How Often Are Agencies & School Districts Posting (on at least one network)?



When we found out vaccines were going to be released, I remember scrambling to get that [information] on social media because people were calling us begging and crying for it,” said Sara Rodriguez, senior public information specialist at Riverside University Health System.



In terms of posting, the data revealed no major changes in the frequency of sharing, except a slight nod to a decrease in frequency, which could relate to a number of things like fatigue from such frequent posting over the last year, network algorithms, and staffing issues. But agencies and districts are still frequently engaging with their community, and when an emergency or crisis does happen, social media remains your most valuable tool.

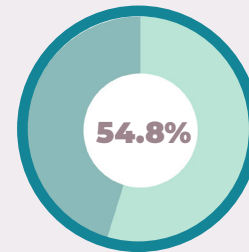


## Tools of the Trade

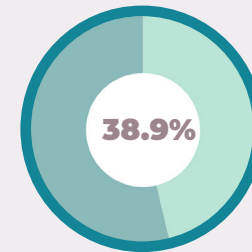
Between day-to-day governance and crisis communications, public agencies have a lot to post on social media. Still, fewer than half of respondents said they use a social media management tool like Hootsuite or Buffer to schedule posts. While these tools can save time, departments can't always find money in their budget for social media. After all, one thing that makes social media such a powerful and accessible tool for public agencies is that it's free.

As constituent engagement continues to rise on social media, agencies and districts feel pressure to evolve their strategies as citizens expect more. Many public communicators have responsibilities beyond managing social media, so having tools that streamline and automate day-to-day tasks can save time and frustration. In terms of other software used, Loomly and Apptegy were also frequently mentioned by respondents.

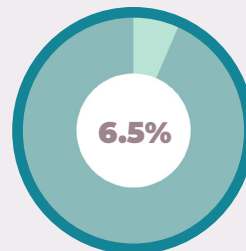
## What Software Are Public Entities Using to Manage/Execute Social Media?



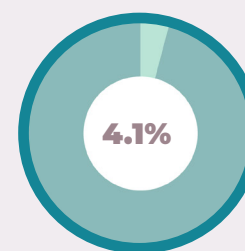
I do not use software to manage/execute social media



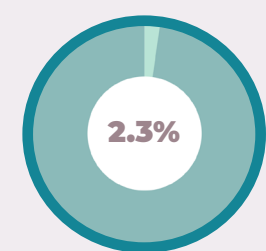
Social media management software (Hootsuite, Sprout, Tweetdeck, Buffer)



Social listening software (Brandwatch, etc.)



Other



Compliance/security software (ZeroFOX)





# POLICY & COMPLIANCE



Earlier in the report, we revealed that **73% of respondents identified “managing controversial topics” as a major barrier to adopting social media for their agency.** And it's no wonder, with topics like COVID-19, critical race theory, and gun violence looming large in the public consciousness.

Debates on these topics and others can get heated, leaving communicators feeling compelled to jump in and play referee. But online comment moderation is complicated for

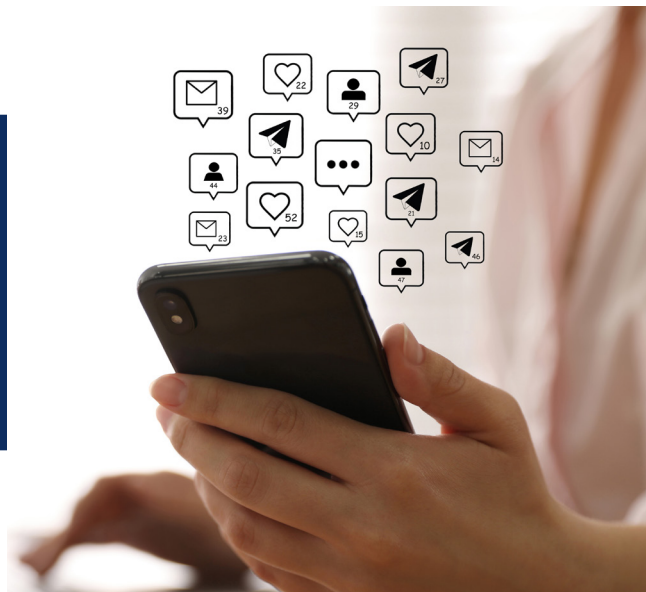
government communicators. Because blocking users and deleting or hiding comments can violate a person's First Amendment rights, it's difficult to determine if and where to draw the line.

Let's dig deeper into how communicators are maintaining compliance for their agency or school district on social media. This section will cover survey questions regarding social media policy, comment moderation, and compliance with public record laws.

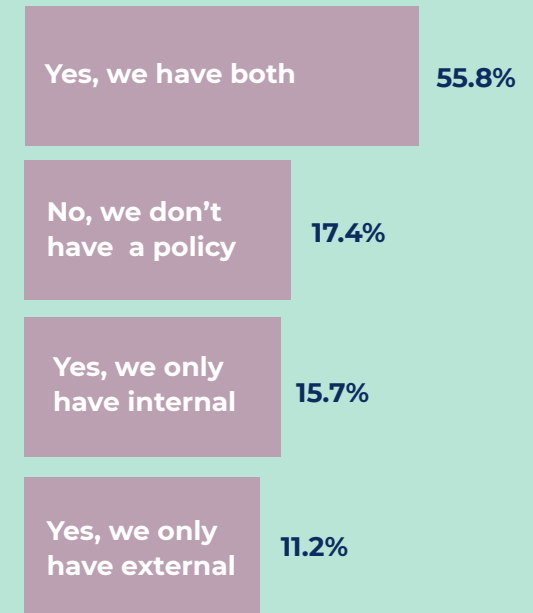
## The Need for Internal & External Policy

Does your agency have a social media policy in place? **55.8% of respondents say their agency has a internal and external social media policy.**

The number of respondents who report no social media policy went down significantly, from 37% in 2021 to just 17.4% in 2022. **That's something to celebrate.**



### Do You Have An Internal And External Social Media Policy?



**33% of respondents are at risk by not having a policy or only having one internally. Without guidelines for your community, you expose your agency or district to risk.**



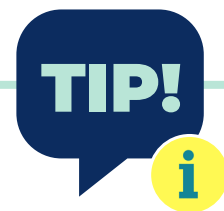
An **internal policy** governs how employees use the agency's social media account to communicate with the public. It guides your staff's use of the agency's social media presence and sets rules for representing the agency and its interests. A successful policy will differentiate between personal and professional use of social media, outline what to post and avoid, and explain rules for records retention of social media content.

An **external policy** lets your community know how best to engage with you and what kind of comments, like promoting a business or off-topic remarks, are likely to be deleted. Comment moderation can be tricky for public agencies and school districts on social media. Still, there is some amount of moderation that keeps conversation healthy and productive while remaining compliant with federal law. Certain kinds of speech, like threats or copyright violations, are not protected by the First

Amendment and can be deleted safely. But remember, unless your policy is consistently enforced (and the records archived), it's easy to find yourself accused of viewpoint discrimination and violating the First Amendment.

**27.3% of respondents with a policy said it's not publicly available.**

**To be most effective, your external social media policy should be publicly available.** Commenters can better understand the rules of the page, and you can refer them to the policy if you get questions about a deleted comment. **Of those respondents with a policy, 28% don't have it publicly available,** which is just as good as not having one at all. On a positive note, most respondents (72%) indicated that they have a publicly available policy.



## Establishing A Policy

If you are interested in establishing a policy and aren't sure where to start, ArchiveSocial has a set of social media policy templates for government, law enforcement, and schools which we'll share later in the report. Working with your attorney for review and approval is also a good idea.

# Avoiding First Amendment Pitfalls & Keeping Moderation to a Minimum

With lawsuits around First Amendment violations increasingly making headlines, it's easy to understand why public communicators are more hesitant to moderate comments on their pages. Over the last year, public agencies have become more inclined to leave all comments on their pages. When we asked respondents how they manage their public comments on social media, 20.4% said they don't remove anything at all, which is a more than 5% increase since last year.

**While 41% of respondents said they use their social media policy to guide moderating comments** on their accounts, 26% had no

formal process. And only 12.8% of respondents said they consult their legal counsel for help moderating comments on their social media pages.

One category of comments that has troubled many public agencies on social media is misinformation. Can you delete the information you know to be incorrect? Warren Kagarise, the digital engagement manager for King County, WA, consulted the county prosecutor's office for advice.

“We've been advised by our legal team from the county prosecutor's office that misinformation is, in fact, protected speech under the First Amendment, and we shouldn't be doing anything with it. So if somebody chooses to post that, it can remain there,” Kagarise said. Similar to Kagarise, consulting with your legal counsel can have a positive impact on your moderation policies.



## How Are Agencies & School Districts Managing Comments



**40.9%**  
We use our social media policy to guide us



**20.4%**  
We don't. Anything posted stays on our page



**26%**  
We use our best judgment



**12.8%**  
We consult with our legal support

**46.4%** of agencies and school districts have no formal process to manage public comments on their social media.

A published social media policy is the external document that sets the ground rules, but it works best when paired with a comment moderation guide. A comment moderation guide is an internal document that shows employees how to fairly and legally apply the rules outlined in the social media policy.

It is crucial to involve your legal counsel in developing your comment moderation policy and in training staff to apply it to avoid legal entanglements from First Amendment violations. The truth is that there are very few instances in which hiding or removing comments is advisable, and your agency or district is better off allowing most comments to remain, however unpalatable the opinions expressed may be.

Mark Weaver, attorney and government crisis communications expert, has joined ArchiveSocial for several webinars on First Amendment protections on social media. He has warned that over-moderating comments by deleting or hiding them on your agency's pages can be dangerous. It may be tempting to make unsavory comments, like insults or profanity, disappear, but those are protected speech and should not be deleted or hidden. Doing so can make your agency – and you personally – vulnerable to a lawsuit. Social media is considered a limited public forum, and Weaver encouraged agencies to translate the First Amendment as, “My agency should not take any action abridging the freedom of speech.”<sup>10</sup>

**TIP!**

### Engaging with Comments

Social media was created to encourage interaction. The most successful public agencies and districts on social media are the ones that face critics head-on. Before hitting delete, embrace the opportunity to ask questions, provide information, correct misunderstandings, and show a different side of the story. Even the most vocal critics can sometimes become the biggest civic boosters when their concerns are heard and addressed. Remember, the algorithm favors engagement, and if you're not telling your story, someone else will.



## To Block or Not to Block?

Blocking is another tricky moderation technique for public agencies. Blocking someone on social media prevents them not only from commenting on your posts but from seeing your posts at all. This action can be controversial. On the one hand, blocking someone who routinely disrupts dialog on your pages can give others a chance to join the conversation. On the other hand, blocking users may be another way to violate their First Amendment rights.

According to the ACLU of New Jersey<sup>11</sup>, there are certain circumstances under which it's okay to block. "Depending on the circumstances, a person can be blocked for posting personal threats or profane language, including in accordance with the social media platform's terms of service. An official can also preclude all comments or, in certain circumstances, limit discussions to certain subjects

– in other words, government officials may have no obligation to open the social media account up for public comment. Still, if they do, they cannot discriminate as to which views get to be expressed in those comments."

**More than half (54.8%) of respondents said they never block users, and 43.2% said they block only when the user violates the agency's social media policy.** Having a social media policy in place and visible on your pages helps community members understand what kind of behavior isn't tolerated, particularly those that compromise safety or security.

**TIP!**



### Maintaining Reach Through Separate Accounts

One of the most coveted metrics associated with a social media account is reach. Whether it is followers on Twitter, Instagram, or Facebook or subscribers on YouTube, an account's audience has real value. Both offices and office holders have a vested interest in maintaining control over the followers they've built up, so you must establish separate accounts for each.

For your agency, community members want to know that there is continuity regardless of who is in office. For the officeholders, their term of office may not be the end of their political ambitions, and they'll want to maintain their followers for the next campaign. Separate pages for the officeholder and office also give the elected official an outlet for their political speech, which may not be appropriate on more neutral office accounts.

# Social Media for Public Officials

News stories of elected officials getting sued or sanctioned for First Amendment violations on social media are increasingly common. There are four primary strategies to help you minimize the risk to your agency that can arise from public officials' use of social media:

1

## Separate Personal and Professional Accounts:

Elected officials need to maintain clear lines of separation between their personal and professional accounts on social media. In a moment, we'll explain the difference and why this is crucial.

2

## Establish Ownership and Representation:

This will help ensure constituents' continuity and prevent costly battles over followers.

3

## Teach First Amendment Fundamentals:

Newly elected officials may need help learning how to manage the diversity of opinions on social media platforms. Without it, they can quickly get into trouble with the delete and block functions.

4

## Finally, Set Boundaries:

Let your officials know the best way to interact with public employees and other elected officials online.

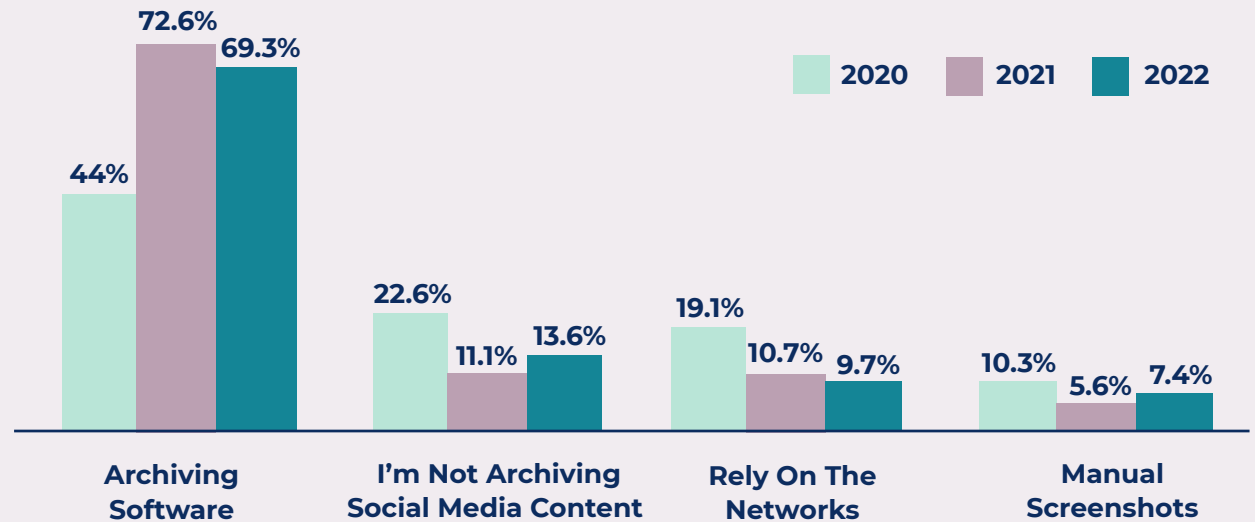


# Public Record Law & Requests for Social Media Data

Social media content is considered a public record in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. When you tweet, post, and share from public agency pages, that content is a public record and can be requested through a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) or records request. To comply with state records laws and to be ready to respond to records requests, eDiscovery, or audits, all social media content must be archived and maintained per records retention requirements. Unfortunately, the platforms aren't required to save this data for you. So without an adequate archiving solution that can ensure in-context capture with metadata, you're not only at risk of losing posts but also any edited, deleted, or hidden comments made on posts.

The survey revealed a slight but worrying increase in respondents trying to keep manual screenshots and not using archiving software. **The use of manual screenshots increased from 5.6% in 2021 to 7.4% in 2022, which could explain the increase in agencies not using archiving software from 11.1% to 13.6%.** Not only is the process of taking manual screenshots very time-consuming, but it's also unstable. Public agencies can't capture all deleted and edited content without archiving software, as it's impossible to manually stay on top of all activity on a page. Screenshots also can't

## How Do You Currently Capture And Archive Your Social Media Content?



**30.7%** respondents are at risk of not complying with state public records laws.

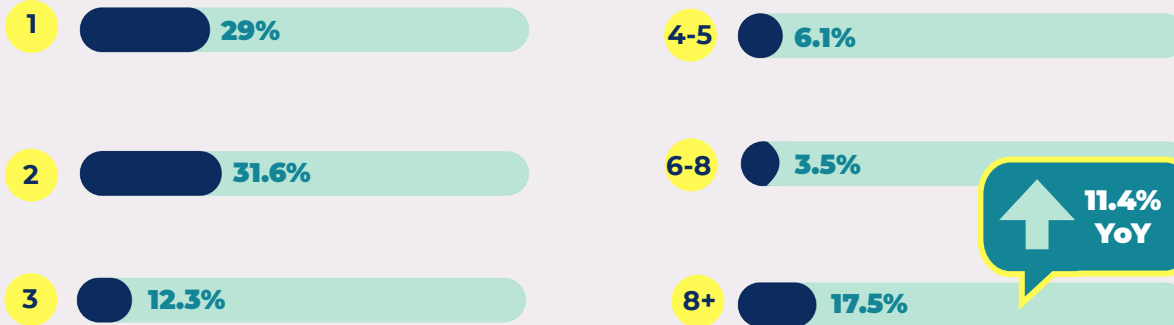
capture metadata or data embedded in the page. And without metadata, it's difficult to prove a screenshot record's authenticity or that it hasn't been tampered with. This means more than 20% of respondents may be losing essential records subject to public records requests.

And it's easier than you think to lose records. According to an internal survey<sup>12</sup> of ArchiveSocial's public sector customers in our archive, we found that **more than eight**

**million of 82 million records had been edited, hidden, or deleted.** That's roughly one in ten records that would have been lost without an archiving solution in place.

**1 in 10 chance of records being edited, hidden, or deleted**

## How Many Public Record Requests For Social Media Content Have You Received In The Past Two Years?



While social media records requests used to be quite rare, they are increasing in frequency. In **2021**, only **6.1%** of respondents reported eight or more social media records requests in the last two years. That number is up to **17.5% in 2022**. And keep in mind that many requests may not call out social media specifically, but agencies and districts should consider whether their response should include content from their social media pages.

Complete and accurate records of social media content are also important if an agency or district is accused of First Amendment violations. Records of social media activity can prove that users were not blocked or comments were not deleted or hidden. Or they may show justification if any of those actions were taken. Either way, a successful defense can hinge on providing evidence. Social media platforms do not save deleted content, and that content is gone forever if it is not being archived. These kinds of lawsuits are increasingly common, and agencies and school districts should be prepared.





# SUSTAINABLE SUCCESS IN 2022 & BEYOND

This next section will address how some respondents are dealing with the increased demands of social media and our tips for how you can work smarter, not harder, to maintain your sanity.



## How Should Agencies and Districts Use Social Media?

Keeping people's attention in crowded social media spaces is a struggle. But when your team has the right resources and best practices to follow, it's easy to humanize your agency and develop a strong community online.

It can be challenging to achieve your objectives if you don't have centralized control over your online presence. Make sure that more than one person has administrative access to your social media accounts and review who has access regularly. Having a single admin is like having only one person who knows the code to the burglar alarm. Everyone who works on the accounts should know the rules,

policies, and guidelines, which will help eliminate risk and frustration.

Next, have consistent branding across all accounts so that you are easily recognizable. Which also helps build trust and credibility. Your policy should include logo usage, brand colors, and voice to ensure consistent messaging and tone across platforms. Remember to keep your platform bios consistent, and link to your social media policies in your profile. Have a primary presence page you can point back to, as this can be extremely useful in times of emergencies.

**To be successful on social media there are seven main objectives you should keep in mind:**

- 1 Build public trust
- 2 Generate citizen engagement
- 3 Motivate your community to take specific actions
- 4 Communicate real-time
- 5 Manage online reputation
- 6 Stop the spread of misinformation
- 7 Build a community of advocates

# Maintaining Control of Social Media Accounts

## How do you manage access to your social media accounts?



## Use the platforms as designed to prevent headaches and get the most from your tools.



Use **Facebook Business Suite** to connect and manage all of your accounts.



Use **Twitter Teams** to grant different permissions to multiple users who can access your account while logged into their handles.



Use **YouTube Brand Account** for multiple people to manage the channel from their Google Accounts without a separate username or password.

## TIP!

### Rules For Maintaining Control

No dummy accounts, no shared logins, set up multi-factor authentication, use strong passwords (and change them regularly), and organize pages using platform tools.

# Setting Expectations to Build Trust and Community

Social media allows you to control the narrative for your agency or school district. You can respond to common questions, address complaints, showcase your work, and build a reputation as a public entity that listens to its community. Social media's real-time nature also allows the opportunity to correct misinformation quickly and develop allies to help. When you build this trust with your community, you create an engaged audience who will turn to you when it matters most, as in times of crisis.

To build a loyal following, you must have good customer service, making timely responses critical. When asked, "Do you have a goal or mandate on how quickly you respond to comments from your community?" **74.5% of survey respondents say they can respond to postings within 24 hours**, with 20.7% setting their response time goal at less than two hours. But social media moves fast. With comments, posts, and reactions moving at such a furious pace, government agencies are finding it challenging to keep up, and of those who do have a goal, 25% don't feel sufficiently staffed to meet it. **Fortunately, this number has decreased by 5% over the last three years of doing this report.**

Public entities should treat questions on social media the way they would in person. Responding to engagement on social media

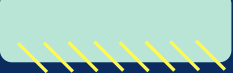
lets residents know you are listening to and invested in what they have to say. Even if you don't have the answer ready, you should acknowledge the question and let the asker know you're working on it. Be consistent with your answers and provide sharable content that makes it easy for others to amplify your message and take the pressure off your team. When you make the information more accessible, it can travel farther with less direct effort.



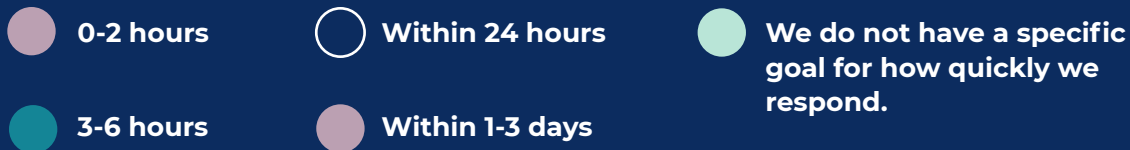
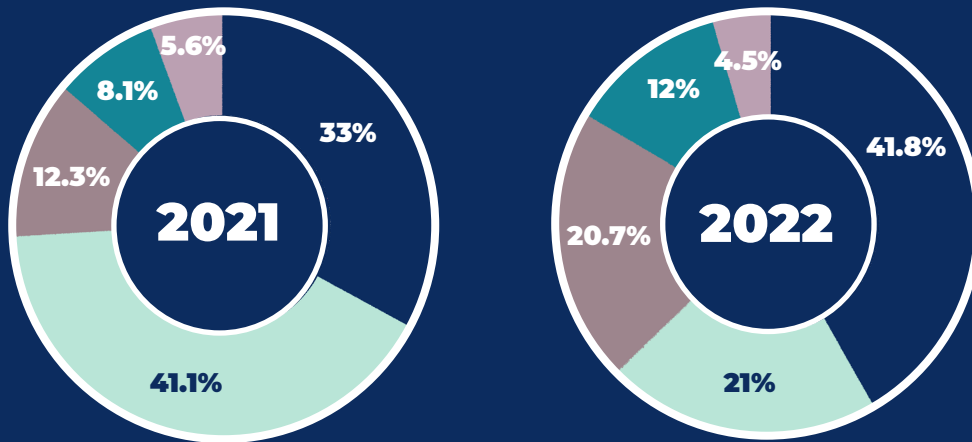
## TIP!

### Define Response Expectations

- Set up standards for how quickly you respond and who responds
- Share your response policy
- Provide alternate resources
- Post about where citizens can find answers
- Signal that you got the message with an acknowledgment
- Weed out spam DMs by marking them as such to preserve your responsiveness stats
- Redirect common questions to a website FAQ page

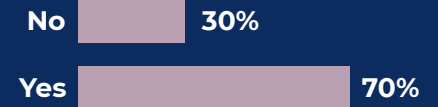


## How Quickly Are Agencies & School Districts Responding to Comments?

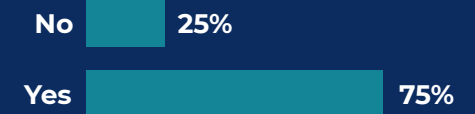


## Confidence To Meet These Goals is Increasing

### 2021



### 2022



More respondents identified having a specific goal for responding to comments since last year, a nearly 20% increase. Overall, there was an increase in respondents who tried to respond within the first 24 hours of receiving a comment. **But of those respondents who have goals, 25% said they are not staffed to meet them.** The good news is that this has been a decreasing trend over the past two years.



## Creating a Positive Feedback Cycle

When it comes to being a source of truth for your community, you must be the author of your own news story. The best way to build trust is open and transparent communication, but that can risk attracting criticism. When creating your narrative, make sure it is backed by facts, explained clearly, disseminated in formats that perform well on your channels, and answers the questions of the public. From there, you can identify gaps in your communications by leaning into the comments and then iterate and improve each time.

Not every critic is a troll, and it's important not to hide from feedback or differing opinions. One of the best things about social media

is the feedback it can provide you to understand your community better. But you have to be able to recognize when someone wants to participate in an honest conversation and when someone isn't interested in what you have to say. To help manage the increased communication volume, leverage your comment moderation and response policy to create a simple rubric for what requires a response and what doesn't. For example, you should always try to respond to honest questions (not baiting/bad faith), correct wrong information, and answer genuine criticism/concerns.



### Create Go-To Conversation Enders For Direct Messages

- A simple thumbs-up signals that you got the message and have nothing more to add
- Crowdsource ideas to determine what's best for you
- Any direct messages marked spam don't impact responsiveness stats

# Finding & Measuring Success

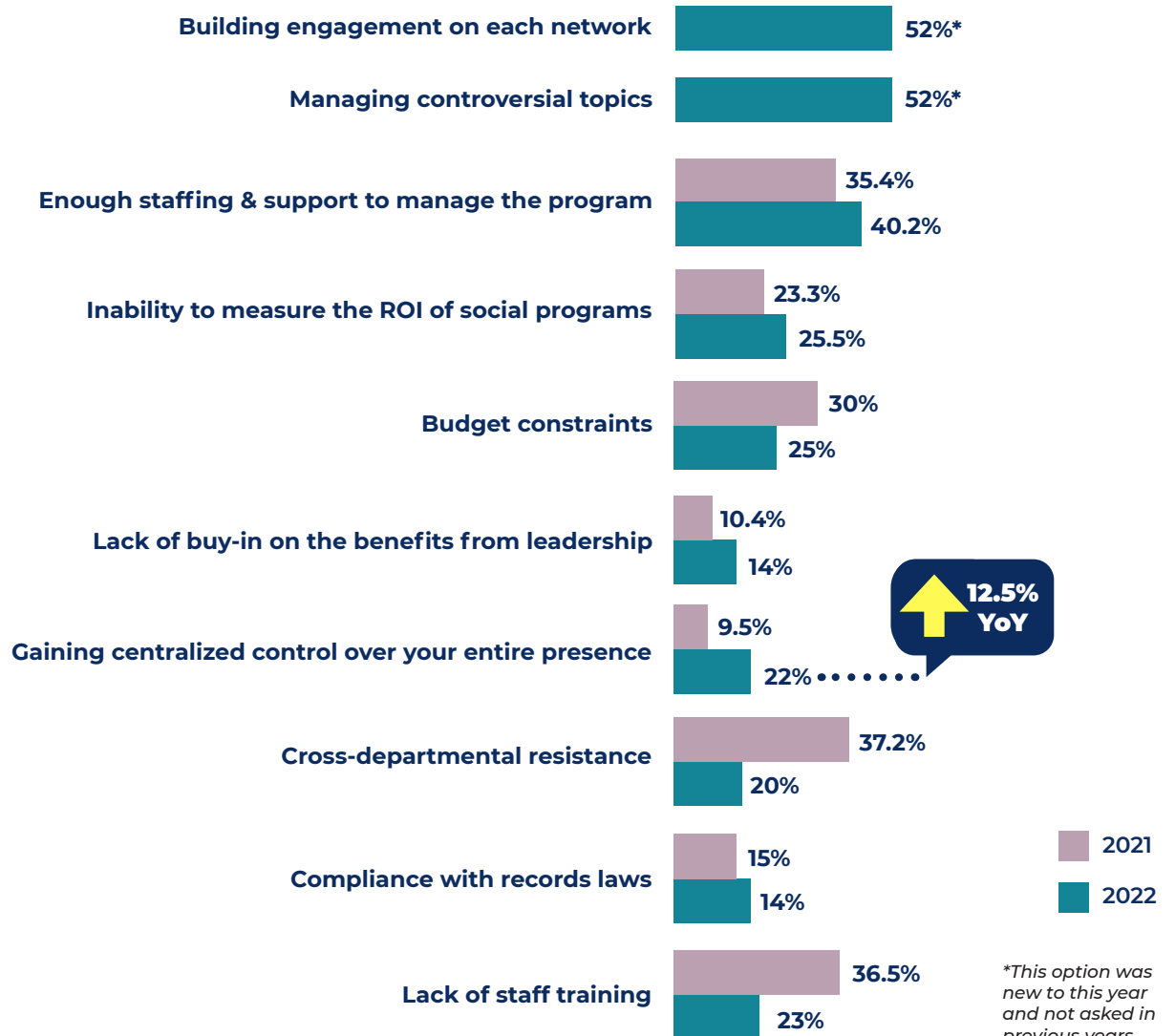
When asked about the top challenges that inhibit the growth and success of social media programs, the top responses at **52% were managing controversial topics and building engagement on each network**. Both can be difficult without enough support, which makes sense as to why **40.2% of respondents indicated a lack of staffing and support** to manage the program as the next greatest challenge they face. Not far behind at 25.5% was the inability to measure the ROI of social programs.

**The challenge of gaining centralized control dramatically increased by more than 12% over the past year.** It can be a lot to manage, but a good way to stay organized is to make a directory of all social media accounts and who manages them. If there is room in the budget, leverage software that allows you to manage multiple accounts in one place.

## TIP!

Also, don't be afraid to sunset an account that isn't working. See if pages can be consolidated and encourage contributions to one page. To do this, check if any share the same or contradicting information and research how often pages are being updated.

## Challenges Inhibiting Social Media Success



\*This option was new to this year and not asked in previous years.

## Overcoming Challenges

Challenges become easier to face when you're able to develop strategies and repeatable processes for overcoming them. For example, when it comes to managing controversial topics, a good comment moderation policy coupled with training can go a long way towards mitigating risk. In terms of gaining support from other departments, you may find success explaining the benefits social media can offer that specific department and tailoring your request based on their priorities and limitations.

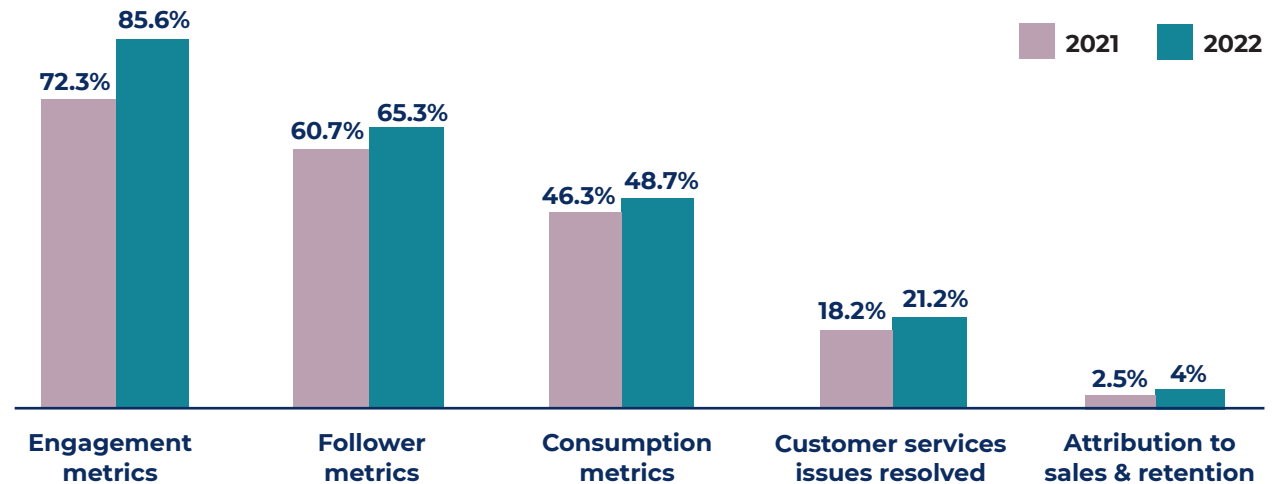
When it comes to building engagement, you must think with a community-first mindset. Step into the shoes of your community members. You have to empathize and become a constant, reliable resource your audience can trust. Remember, you likely have information that the public needs that isn't available elsewhere – leverage this to grow your reach and become a trusted source.

**TIP!**

### Plan Ahead

Limited personnel and time can be a roadblock, but creating an editorial calendar and using scheduling tools can help you save time and manage channels effectively. You can also cultivate a sharing culture by encouraging others to submit content. Plan content in advance, use scheduling tools and crowdsource content.

## Which Metrics Does Your Organization Use To Measure The Success Of Social Initiatives?



But what should you do once you've built that engagement? As competition for attention continues to increase, social media communicators should focus on their audience metrics and make sure you're reaching your local community. Of the survey respondents that measure the success of their social initiatives, engagement metrics remain the top reference. On one positive note, an increase was noted in all metrics used to measure social media success, telling us that there is a growing understanding of measuring what success looks like.

While it can be easy to get distracted by vanity platform-wide metrics, they won't mean much unless they are tied to a specific goal. 25.5% of respondents listed the "inability to measure the ROI of social programs" as a top challenge

that inhibits their success. It's important to put your goals first and use metrics to measure those goals' progress. This will allow you to understand better how the engagement of specific campaigns can fit into your broader communication strategy on the topic.

Even though likes and followers are easy to explain, who you reach can be as much if not more important than how many you reach. Agencies and school districts are increasingly looking at regional metrics and using tools that help limit reach by regions. You can better integrate your goals and build buy-in for specific platforms when you switch to campaign-oriented metrics across multiple channels.

# WHAT YOU CAN DO NOW



## Choose Your Platforms

If you're not on social media yet, here's a guide to help you choose what major platforms would be most effective for your agencies or district to join. If you're already on social media, use this guide to help you select which content types work best for each platform.

**f Facebook** has the widest range of content types, and a little bit of everything can keep audiences engaged.

**Instagram** content should focus on visuals and rely less on captions. This platform is great for tourist destinations, local nature and parks, and special events.

**in** Share job openings and content that showcases office culture on **LinkedIn**.

**Twitter** keeps things short, so news updates are best here. Traffic, weather, and other brief announcements perform well.

**YouTube** is a great place to post recorded meetings, event advertisements, and other video content.

**TikTok** also showcases videos, but humorous content does best on this platform. Have a clever or funny PSA? Share it here.

## Build Engagement

Following these eight steps will help you build engagement and make the most out of your social media presence. Setting goals and analyzing metrics will help you define and measure success, adapt strategies along the way, and demonstrate value to leadership.

### 8 Steps for building engagement on social media:

1. Align the goals you set with your community's needs.
2. Set up key performance indicators to understand what success looks like.
3. Build your messaging pillars and subtopics.
4. Perform keyword research to refine those messages.
5. Get human! Go before the screen and embrace the fear of facing the public online.
6. Get creative. Publish a diverse range of content that engages and delights.
7. Be responsive and engage in social listening to understand the public response.
8. Review analytics for actionable insights.

## Get Compliant

Government social media content is public record, and community comments are protected by the First Amendment. Policy, training, and account security are crucial for public agencies and school districts on social media. Check out these resources to help you maintain compliance with public records laws and the Constitution.

### Account Security:

- [Initial Security Assessment](#)
- [Semi-Annual Social Media Checkup](#)

### Social Media Policy:

- [Social Media Policy Templates](#)
- [Comment Moderation Guide](#)  
*("Should You Delete That Post?" Flowchart Inside)*
- [Is Social Media a Public Forum?](#)

### Records Compliance:

- [What Constitutes a Social Media Public Record?](#)
- [Legal Considerations for Record Keeping & Retention](#)
- [Explore Your State's Public Records Laws](#)



# WHAT'S NEXT?



Platform growth has nearly stalled in 2022, but that doesn't mean social media is on its way out. On the contrary, social media has become table stakes in public agency communications; residents expect to receive updates and news via social media. Though these expectations were largely set by the pandemic and the need to disseminate information quickly and widely, they haven't changed even now that most restrictions have been lifted. When fewer critical updates are coming through, dreaming up content and creating it can make social media communications a larger daily time commitment.

Public agencies and school districts can more effectively manage their time by investing in social media scheduling tools to pre-plan content for days or weeks ahead. Communicators can set aside time once or twice a week to create content rather than worrying over it as a daily task. Which also frees up time to draft urgent communications when needed and respond to commu-

nity member comments and questions. Only 38.9% of respondents said they are currently using this tool.

Adding more platforms to your agency's roster of accounts can also increase the need for scheduling tools. TikTok is gaining popularity, and many survey respondents said they were looking to join TikTok as their next social media venture. TikTok represents an exciting opportunity for public agencies to reach new community members, especially young people. But the platform isn't without its challenges and controversies. One important tool that will make TikTok more accessible to government communicators is automatic archiving, which hasn't yet been possible on the platform. Fortunately, advances are being made on this front, and ArchiveSocial is working daily to make this feature available to customers.



# METHODOLOGY



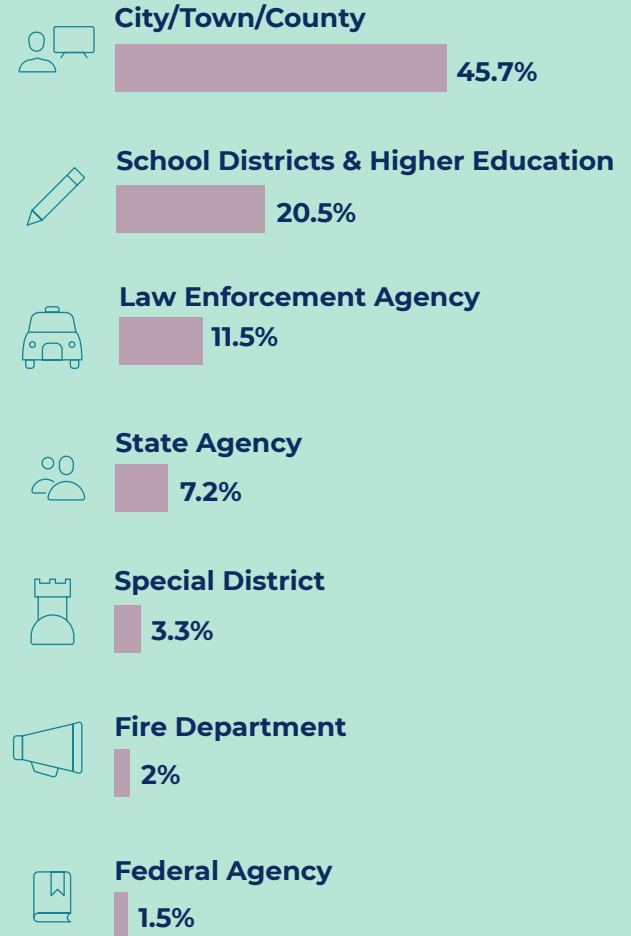
The State of Social Media in the Public Sector survey was designed as a benchmarking tool for public sector agencies using social media as a channel for official communication. The topics covered in the survey were based on frequently asked questions from customers, members of online forums for public sector communicators, and attendees at public sector webinars and virtual conferences.

The survey included questions about demographic information, social media platforms, social media policy and practice, social media software, metrics, and public records. Some respondents received a more limited set of questions based on their preliminary responses. The research aimed to collect insightful information about the current and future trends of public sector social media.

This year, in April 2022, ArchiveSocial surveyed over seven hundred state and local governments, law enforcement agencies, and school districts. Total anonymity was guaranteed for all of the respondents. With the knowledge gained from research questions, our goal is for readers to be able to optimize their social media strategy for stronger security, compliance, and engagement.

Close to half of the respondents represent town, city, or county governments (45.7%). The next two largest groups of participants represented school districts (20.5%) and law enforcement (11.5%).

## Who Did We Talk To?





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## About ArchiveSocial

ArchiveSocial is the leading public records and archiving software in the public sector, ensuring legal protection and compliance with public records and decreased costs associated with records requests management. With ArchiveSocial, thousands of forward-thinking government entities, law enforcement agencies, and educational organizations can openly and transparently communicate online. ArchiveSocial is powered by CivicPlus.

To learn more about compliant social media best practices and how you can start automatically archiving your pages, visit [ArchiveSocial.com](https://www.archive-social.com)