

# MEDIA FOR ADVOCACY

## ***ACTION GUIDE***



**VIRGINIA CONSERVATION NETWORK**  
2021

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# 1

## SOCIAL MEDIA

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There are more ways to communicate with advocates and decision makers than ever before. Different social media platforms have varying strengths and weaknesses in terms of their ability to capture an audience and motivate action - so we need to understand how to use which tools.

Importantly, your social media strategy is just one piece of your communications strategy, which should reflect your off-line work, including organizational and campaign goals.

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## FOUNDATIONS OF DIGITAL COMMUNICATIONS

SHERI SHANNON, [\*Shannon Strategies\*](#)

1. Your communications objectives should always align with organizational and campaign goals. That will always include finding ways to raise the visibility and credibility of the organization.
2. A lot of social media advocacy and engagement is driven by digital activities and the work you're doing off-line. That looks like blog posts, emails, events, meetings, community listening sessions, advocacy days, and so on.
3. Who are your audiences and what do they need to know? Where are the gaps? What messages are you targeting to each audience? It always goes back to the outcomes you are trying to achieve. Do you want to persuade, inform, build relationships, or mobilize? Is it all of the above?
4. Understand your capacity and work with the resources you have. Create an editorial calendar, establish a posting & review processes, and then utilize tools like HootSuite and Canva to create and manage your content. Remember to drive folks to your website!
5. Lastly, build a body of work. You want to establish yourself as an authoritative and credible figure. Make yourself available and accessible. You want folks to connect with your organization so they will share, subscribe, donate, volunteer, advocate and help with your mission.

## EFFECTIVE MESSAGING THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA

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- Build people's **sense of efficacy**: convey that they are capable of acting, and their action will have an impact.
- Emphasize **social norms**: people like you are taking action (positive peer pressure)!

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## WHAT KIND OF CONTENT SHOULD YOU PRODUCE?

- Content that **validates sense of self** - share content that people want others to see them engaging with (i.e. funny, inspirational, meaningful, smart).
- Share content that is **authentic** to your organization's voice.
- Make content **"snackable"** - content that is easily digestible and shareable with a clear action item.
- Use the **80/20 rule** - 80% can be shared from allies and partners, and 20% of your posts should be original content.

# Which *type of content* drives more online actions?



TEXT OVER IMAGE IS AN EXAMPLE OF “SNACKABLE” CONTENT

## GENERAL POSTING PRINCIPLES

- Schedule posts 3 - 6 times a week - but share time-sensitive content immediately.
- Use content that asks questions and solicits feedback to better understand who is engaging with your digital platforms.
- Use the **60/40 rule** - 60% of your content should be focused on your organizations immediate priorities, and 40% should be on adjacent topics that still stay true to your organization's voice and mission to keep your page interesting.

## HOW TO EVALUATE SUCCESS

- Ignore “**vanity metrics**” - like list sizes, likes, and clicks.
- Focus on **effects** - the amount of actions taken, event turnout, and meeting campaign goals.

## TWITTER

### What's it good for?

- Messaging > Organizing!
- Twitter is best for directly reaching elected officials, decision-makers, influencers, and thought leaders.
- Sharing timely, in-the-moment event coverage.
- Good for framing your story / narrative (use twitter “threads”).

### What's it not good for?

- Don't use twitter to motivate someone to do something off-line, or even on a different webpage.





**“Press is overrepresented on Twitter - which makes it a great way to get the attention of journalists.”** - *Nathan Henderson-James, the Climate Advocacy Lab*

**“When it comes to social media, you do not always have to think macro, or globally. You want to find your people - the folks on the ground that are doing the work.”** - *Sheri Shannon, Shannon Strategies (pictured right)*



## FACEBOOK

### What does Facebook’s algorithm like?

- Posting with the story function
- Posts in groups
- Fundraisers
- Posts by individuals, as opposed to Pages:  
*make sure to make your posts public!*

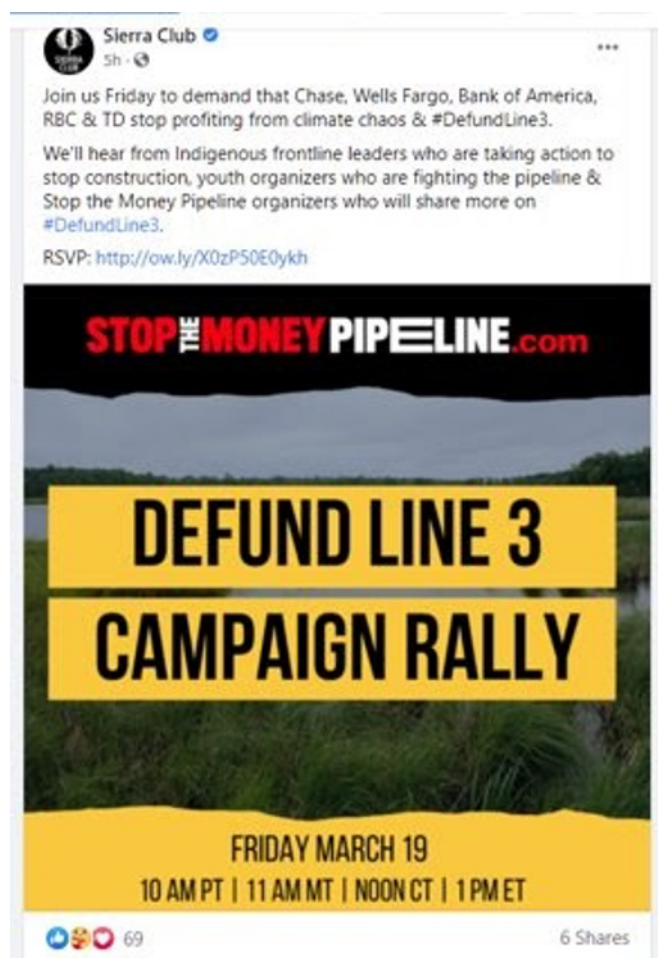
### Sustaining Engagement

Engaged groups are prioritized by the Facebook algorithm. Engagement helps build, strengthen, and leverage existing relationships. You can sustain engagement by using Facebook to organize actions, share stories, share mutual support + accountability, and so on. Facebook relies on moderators to promote a healthy community and upload norms + standards.

### Mobilizing People

People are much more likely to take action off-line when prompted by Facebook, as opposed to Twitter.

You can take a deep dive on the best way to motivate people with [evidence-based insights here](#).



# 2

## OP-EDs

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### WHY WRITE OP-EDs?

- Good ideas should be heard!
- Press builds the credibility and recognition of your organization.
- Op-Eds can reach key decision makers for a particular issue and offers a potential solution.

### BEST PRACTICES FOR WRITING OP-EDs

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- Op-Eds should be limited to one author - unless you're a member of Congress.
- Your article should be limited to 500 - 800 words. However, each news outlet has different specifications so check your outlet's op-ed requirements first.
- Submit your op-ed to the paper that reaches the target audience you think should hear your message, rather than one target decision maker.

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### OP-ED STRUCTURE

#### Hook/Lede

The hook should grab the reader's attention withing the first two sentences. Common hooks include:

- Counterintuitive takes
- Personal experience
- Compelling anecdote
- Response to recent, high-profile news

#### Body

The body of the op-ed presents your argument and establishes the author's credibility on the subject matter. The body provides background and evidence on the subject, including real-world examples and impacts.

The argument will be followed by an explanation of the solution and a brief acknowledgment of any relevant counter-arguments.

#### Conclusion

The conclusion will be your call-to-action - what should the reader do next? A good call-to-action is clear, concrete, and actionable.

## PITCHING OP-EDs

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The first question to ask yourself when pitching your op-ed is: which paper should you submit it to? Your selected paper should be reflective of your intended audience. Only pitch one paper. Make sure to give the outlet 24-48 hours to respond to your pitch. If there is no response, respectfully let the outlet know that you will pitch your op-ed elsewhere.

When pitching your op-ed, ensure that you emphasize why your piece is *timely* (and it has to actually be timely)! Your email pitch should:

- Answer the questions: Why now? Why you? So what?
- Provide a short summary of the issue.
- Include your credentials and contact information.
- Most importantly - include the piece!

**“There’s an old saying: Op-Ed authors are one-handed. You don’t have to say, ‘oh, on this hand, but on the other hand’. You have an opinion and that’s what you need to get across.”** - Meshal DeSantis, Director of Communications - National Wildlife Federation

Opinion

# 7.7 Million Young People Are Unemployed. We Need a New ‘Tree Army.’

The Depression-era Civilian Conservation Corps helped build America at a time of national crisis. Let’s do it again.

**By Collin O’Mara**  
Mr. O’Mara is the president and C.E.O. of the National Wildlife Federation.

May 18, 2020

An example of one the National Wildlife Federation’s most well-received op-eds ran in the [New York Times](#).

# 3

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR (LTEs)

Letters to the editor (LTEs) are short submissions to local papers that provide a personal opinion about a current issue. Be sure to double check the submission guidelines (including length and personal information, such as address) for the paper in your region. Here are a few tips to keep in mind:

### Respond to a Recent Article

Responding to an article published by the paper boosts your chance of having it published.

### Follow a Structure

1. The opening line should state which article you are responding to, if any, and the purpose of your letter. Use language that grabs the reader's attention.
2. The first paragraph should explain why the issue is important and how it affects you or your community personally.
3. The second paragraph should supply 1 - 2 facts or figures at most to support your position, if necessary.
4. Make an explicit ask. For example, "The Governor should commit to fully funding the Stormwater Local Assistance Fund with the recommended \$51 million."
5. The closing line should be a succinct statement which wraps up your letter.

### Best Practices

- Keep your LTE short and to the point - papers have different requirements, but most LTEs are less than 200 words.
- Keep it personal - spend the most time on why the issue affects you or your community.

### Follow-up

To follow-up on your submitted LTE, look for contact information in the opinion section of your selected paper and call the following day to ask if they plan to publish your submission. If they do not plan to publish it, ask how they recommend you edit your letter to make it fit to publish.







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