

CREATING CHANGE THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA

LESSONS FOR TAX CREDIT ADVOCATES

This case study is part of a series examining the strategies and messages used by advocates to create, expand or protect state Earned Income Tax Credits.

BACKGROUND

Popular social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat have created new ways for people to form deeper and more personal connections with organizations and issues they are passionate about. These platforms offer nonprofits and other organizations a unique opportunity to reach their audiences and promote their causes in new and interesting ways.

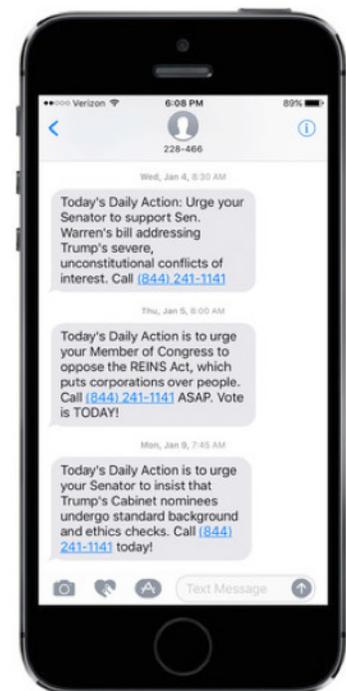
For advocates promoting tax credit legislation, social media can be used to expand existing campaigns and launch new initiatives. This summary highlights a range of social media tools that will help enhance any advocacy efforts.

SMS CAMPAIGNS

Text message campaigns, also known as short message service (SMS) campaigns, can be a highly effective tool to reach target audiences, and have multiple advantages over email or traditional mail campaigns. Research shows that text messages have significantly higher open rates compared to email and standard mail and are much more likely to reach their intended audience.

SMS campaigns offer the potential for a highly engaged and participatory audience since all participants must actively opt into the service. Organizations using these campaigns must follow a strict set of rules and regulations to ensure the service is safe and trustworthy for recipients, which increases the level of trust and reliability for those signing up. Text message campaigns also offer different levels of interaction that can be tailored to an organization's needs. For instance, they can be used to solicit donations, provide breaking news, offer tips on various issues, or raise awareness about an event or cause.

Tax credit advocates can use the SMS campaign platform to raise awareness about legislation, send updates on a bill's progress and encourage supporters to reach out to their elected officials. They are also a



useful education tool, allowing advocates to send out facts about tax credits and how they benefit low-income workers, or where low-income filers can find their nearest Volunteer Income Tax Assistance site.

Text message campaigns can be especially effective methods for mobilizing tax credit supporters into action around pending legislation. For example, Daily Action, which was created after the 2016 election, sends subscribers a daily text to encourage people to contact their elected officials to address issues it deems urgent, such as opposing a Cabinet nominee or a piece of legislation. Since its launch in December 2016, Daily Action says it has facilitated about 5,000 calls to Congress each day via its approximately 100,000 subscribers.

- **How to use it:** State advocates could consider a similar approach focused on tax legislation in their state or as a tax reform or budget proposal moves through Congress. These texts can keep constituents informed about changes to the bill and include an action item for supporters to have them call their elected officials to weigh in on the legislation.

SOCIAL MEDIA TACTICS

Facebook

Facebook has several features organizations can leverage to promote issues they care about. The most popular are the check-in feature, Facebook Live and paid advertising.

Facebook “check-ins” – Originally created to let family and friends know someone is safe during a crisis, this feature can also be used to raise awareness about social issues. When users post to Facebook they can click the “check-in” button to indicate their location and share a brief message. Throughout the Dakota Access Pipeline protests, activists across the country used Facebook to “check in” at Standing Rock in solidarity even if they could not be physically present. This also helped raise awareness about the protests to audiences who may not have known they were going on. Many included a message about the protests and links to fundraisers and other ways to support the cause from afar.

- **How to use it:** Tax credit advocates can have constituents “check in” at their State Capitol and include a statement in favor of a tax credit bill. Many supporters cannot physically protest at their capitol building due to location or time constraints, but this method allows them to advocate from wherever they happen to be – and increase pressure on lawmakers to support tax credit legislation.

Facebook Live – Originally created to let family and friends know someone is safe during a crisis, this feature can also be used to raise awareness about social issues. When users post to Facebook they can click the “check-in” button to indicate their location and share a brief message. Throughout the Dakota Access Pipeline protests, activists across the country used Facebook to “check in” at Standing Rock in solidarity even if they could not be physically present. This also helped raise awareness about the protests to audiences who may not have known they were going on. Many included a message about the protests and links to fundraisers and other ways to support the cause from afar.



Example of a [live stream](#) on Facebook of a Prosperity Now protest of the GOP Tax Plan at the Capitol building

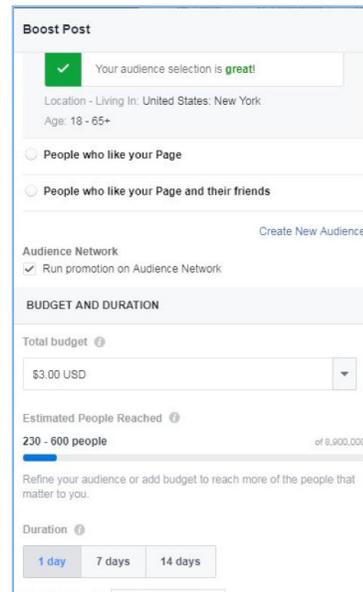
- **How to use it:** Advocates can live stream tax credit rallies, press conferences, policy briefings or other events to keep supporters who can't be there engaged and connected.

Paid Advertising— Because Facebook uses a complex algorithm to control which posts appear on each user's newsfeed, most organizations' posts are only seen by a very small percentage of its followers. However, Facebook offers the option to purchase advertising in the form of “boosted posts,” which bypass the standard algorithm and allow organizations and individuals to reach a much larger population. An organization can boost a post based on reach or link clicks. Boosted posts allow a user to define a target audience based on specific criteria and schedule the ad to run for as long as they decide. While this involves some cost, Facebook ads are relatively inexpensive and can make an enormous difference. Without advertising, less than five percent of followers will see any given post. An organization can budget any amount they would like to advertise on Facebook.

- **How to use it:** State advocates can boost posts with important tax credit content such as infographics or a social media video. The organization would define an audience based on location and any other relevant criteria, and then boost the post to better reach the targeted audience.



Example of a [boosted video](#) from Tax Credits for Workers and Families. Every Facebook post includes a “boost post” button at the bottom.



The criteria an organization can set for each boosted post such as audience criteria, reach and duration.

Twitter

Twitter is an excellent platform for promoting causes. But to be effective groups need to have a network of partner organizations and influential users they can leverage to promote and share content on their behalf. A “Twitter Chat” can be especially useful for organizations that have established a strong partner network.

A Twitter Chat uses a common hashtag to facilitate discussion on a specific topic and allows supporters to provide commentary, ask and answer questions, and engage with partner organizations. The host of the Twitter Chat can provide partner organizations with a toolkit that includes pre-written tweets and graphics to share during the chat to raise awareness and garner support for a particular issue.

- **How to use it:** Advocates can use Twitter Chats to educate and raise awareness about tax credits or to gain support for specific tax credit legislation. State advocates can create a general tax credits hashtag or a bill-specific version, along with tweets and visuals. Once a date and time for the chat are selected, advocates should promote it through email and social media to partner groups and encourage as many people as possible to join.

Instagram

Instagram, which allows users to exclusively post visual content, is an effective tool for integrating real people and stories into an organization’s campaign. Instagram can also be leveraged across other platforms as Instagram posts can be easily shared on Facebook and Twitter.

- **How to use it:** A photo or video campaign could integrate a human element into a conversation about tax credits. For instance, advocates could create a series of 30-second videos featuring tax credit recipients talking about how their lives would change if they did not receive the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC). These videos could be posted to Instagram weekly and shared by partner organizations on their social media sites. This type of campaign would be persuasive for lawmakers and constituents to see how the credits affect people in their everyday lives.

Earth Rights International, which fights environmental injustices, used Instagram to create a [Faces of Change](#) storytelling campaign that amplified the stories of earth defenders across the world. By utilizing real activists and their stories, ERI created a story with a human face.

Website Tools

Advocates can add content to their websites that encourages users to take specific actions on behalf of a cause. This content is most effective when the “ask” is made as simple as possible –for example, asking users to click a button to send a pre-written email to their state representatives.

Congressional Search Engines — While this is not a new function, it can be an effective tool for state advocates since many Americans do not know who their elected officials are or how to engage with them, particularly at the state level. These search engines provide an easily accessible platform to learn about elected officials with minimal effort.

- **How to use it:** The search engine should include information about each elected official, the committees they sit on, and their stance on issues related to tax credits and anti-poverty initiatives. This feature can facilitate calls to action. As different legislation comes up for a vote, the organization can direct users to the site’s congressional search engine to quickly get the information they need to contact their elected official.



Embedded Content — Organizations can embed content such as petitions, newsletter sign-up forms and messages to elected officials, which can be used in conjunction with a congressional search engine. These tools make it easy for supporters to take action

and also allow organizations to gather data about constituents, so they can communicate with them more effectively.

Organizations can also embed “share to Facebook” or “click to tweet buttons” on their site. These should be used sparingly to promote specific content, such as a video, infographic, call to action or an important article the group wants to promote. Users can click the button and the content is automatically shared on their respective social media sites, which increases the organization’s reach and potentially introduces them to new audiences.

- **How to use it:** Tax credit advocates can embed a form on their website that allows users to contact their representatives directly and voice their support for specific tax credit legislation. Advocates should include pre-written content that users can modify or re-write in their own words, and ask each user to provide their zip code in order to be connected directly to the correct representative.

If you are interested in one of these strategies and need help executing a campaign, please contact TCWF Director Lauren Pescatore at (301) 656-0348 or lpescatore@thehatchergroup.com.

Tax Credits for Workers and Their Families (TCWF) is a strategic communications campaign working to promote the Earned Income Tax Credit, Child Tax Credit and other tax credits at the state and federal level. We offer communications support to advocates and policymakers working to enact new tax credits or improve existing ones. Our website (www.taxcreditsforworkersandfamilies.org) provides information, resources and tools to help community-based organizations and elected officials raise awareness about these important tax credits and help working families get ahead.

TCWF is a non-partisan initiative led by The Hatcher Group, a communications and public affairs firm dedicated to inspiring social change for good.