



**TEXAS  
GEAR  
UP**

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**SOCIAL MEDIA  
STRATEGIES AND  
BEST PRACTICES**





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## WHY SOCIAL MEDIA STRATEGY MATTERS

By its nature, social media connects us. It's a way for us to not only connect with other Texas GEAR UP grants and schools, but it's also helpful for keeping updated on the latest educational news and trends.

As savvy educators, it's easy to recognize that social media is a powerful tool to communicate ideas, events, and other important information to TXGU students, parents, and other key stakeholders. But, what might not be as obvious is **why** creating and executing a social media strategy is so important. By making a thoughtful social media strategy, you will be able to clearly define goals that are important to you and for your TXGU cohorts, measure and track your progress toward your goals, and, perhaps most importantly, connect with your audience on a meaningful level. That connection is key to getting the word out about TXGU events, increasing parent and student engagement, and sharing TXGU's mission that every student deserves a chance at college.

That said, we've created a step-by-step social media strategy guide that walks you through the entire process and features tons of tips for creating and posting content, best practices, how to choose audiences based on platform, and much more. Ideally, this guide will serve as a reference for you and your Texas GEAR UP team, helping to reach any overarching goals your grant may have.



### DETERMINING GOALS

When conducting outreach via social media, it is important to ensure that it ties into your grant's larger goals.

#### Questions to answer before moving forward:

##### *What is the main goal of your grant?*

In addition to your goal of making college accessible to all students, what is the one goal your grant hopes to achieve? It can range from a seemingly small goal like increasing online engagement with your student to a larger, organizational goal such as ensuring every TXGU student within your grant applies to college.

Goals may vary over the course of the year, so be sure to adjust your strategy when your goals change.

##### *What digital media goals do you have for your grant?*

Whether you're trying to increase awareness about parent events, generate word-of-mouth buzz about TXGU in your community, connect with other college-prep experts, or share college and career advice, these digital media goals will help ensure that your posts are relevant and working toward your main goal.



# DEFINING YOUR AUDIENCE AND DETERMINING WHAT PLATFORM IS THE BEST TO REACH THEM

Knowing your audience is the key to successful engagement on social media platforms. If your target audience is students but your posts are about education industry trends, chances are engagement on that post/platform will be low. Audiences will likely vary from platform to platform. For example, your audience for Instagram is likely going to be students, while your audience for Facebook will likely consist of parents and other educators.

SOCIAL NETWORK	TYPICAL PRIMARY AUDIENCE*
<p><b>Facebook</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1.71 billion monthly active users</li> <li>• A great way to reach parents with updates, college-prep information, and events</li> <li>• Although many teens still use Facebook, engagement tends to be better with adults on this platform</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 72% of adult internet users use Facebook, of which 66% are men and 77% are women</li> <li>• Of people aged 18-29, 82% are active users; 30-49, 79% are active users; 50-64, 64% are active users; 65+, 48% are active users</li> <li>• 70% of white/non-Hispanic audiences are users, 67% of black/non-Hispanic audiences are users, 75% of Hispanic audiences are users</li> </ul>
<p><b>Twitter</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 310 million monthly active users</li> <li>• A good way to connect with other educators and find college-prep or educational trends</li> <li>• Many users rely on Twitter to stay up-to-date on industry news and trends through the use of hashtags</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 23% of adult internet users use Twitter, of which 25% are men and 21% are women</li> <li>• Of people aged 18-29, 32% are active users; 30-49, 29% are active users; 50-64, 13% are active users; 65+, 6% are active users</li> <li>• 20% of white/non-Hispanic audiences are users, 28% of black/non-Hispanic audiences are users, 28% of Hispanic audiences are users</li> </ul>
<p><b>Instagram</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 500 million monthly active users</li> <li>• A wonderful way to connect with students through visually compelling images and engaging captions</li> <li>• Many teens and young adults are often influenced by the visually compelling nature of this platform</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 28% of adult internet users use Instagram, of which 24% are men and 31% are women</li> <li>• Of people aged 18-29, 55% are active users; 30-49, 28% are active users; 50-64, 11% are users; 65+, 4% are users</li> <li>• 21% of white/non-Hispanic audiences are users, 47% of black/non-Hispanic audiences are users, 38% of Hispanic audiences are users</li> </ul>

\*Gathered from the Pew Research Center

Many more platforms exist outside of the “big three,” and are worth considering based on your goals and needs. Other platforms to consider include:

### SNAPCHAT

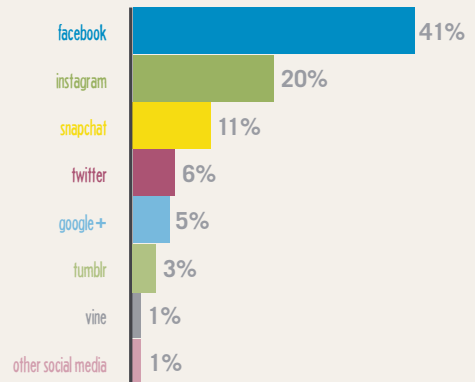
Snapchat is a mobile messaging application used to share photos, videos, text, and drawings. It’s free to download the app and free to send messages using it. The app is very popular with young adults. Snapchat is different from other forms of texting and photo-sharing because the messages disappear from the recipient’s phone after a few seconds.

Snapchat has more than 100 million monthly users. Some educators take the “can’t beat them, might as well join them” approach to the platform and use it as a way to show students real-life examples of topics that were covered in class that week. Because of the sensitive nature of the platform, educators should check with their schools’ social media guidelines before selecting this option for outreach.

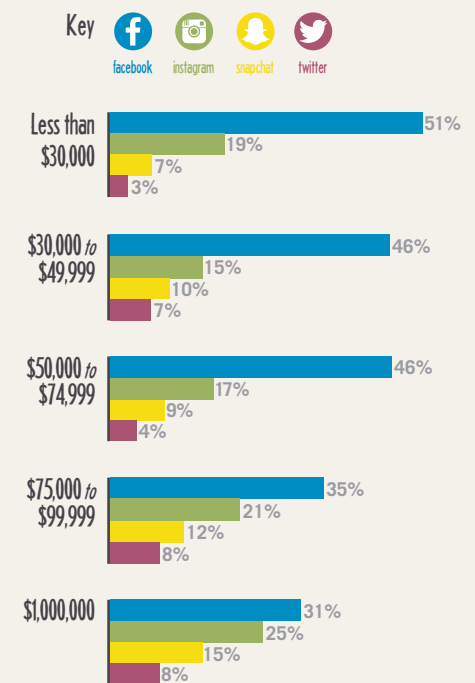
### YOUTUBE

YouTube is a social media platform that connects users through the power of video. Users can upload videos to the platform, allowing the general public to view the shared videos. These videos can range from DIY to professionally made. Depending on the audience, the type of video that resonates with them can vary—teens prefer more gritty, raw, unedited videos with low production quality, while adults tend to prefer more polished, clean, and carefully edited videos with high production quality.

Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat Used Most Often by American Teens (Percent of all teens who use social media most often)



Snapchat More Likely to Be Used Most Often by Wealthier Teens; Facebook Most Popular Among Lower Income Youth (Among teens ages 13 to 17, the percent of teens who use social media most often, by household income)



The mammoth YouTube has over a billion users, many of who are in the 18-49 age range—more than any cable network in the U.S. YouTube can be an extremely effective tool for reaching teens, but often requires a lot of time and effort to develop and create the content.

### AND MORE...

Of course, there are many more platforms (like LinkedIn, Pinterest, Tumblr, Vine, and Google+) that are available to use as an effective means of outreach. Though they're not used as frequently as the other platforms listed, they may be worth consideration for your overall outreach strategy.

## CREATING CONTENT, WHEN, AND HOW OFTEN TO POST



Now that you've determined your goals and target audience, you'll need to create content that speaks to both. Perhaps the trickiest part about creating social media posts is finding the right mix of content. Being mindful of your goals and your audience will help determine the ratio of TXGU promotion vs. general information you'll share. A good rule of thumb is a 50/50 mix—so, if you were posting four times a week, two of those posts would be specific to your TXGU grant and two posts would cover general college-prep or other educationally trending topics relevant to your audience (for parents, this could be a college-prep checklist; for students, it could be an infographic about hot jobs available in Texas).

**Some tips on creating engaging content for your audiences:**

- **Create or share inspiring content that meets your audiences' needs**
- **Create or share content that sparks conversation among your audiences**
- **Seek to garner feedback by asking opinions**
- **Promote TXGU grant information, including:**
  - \* Important dates, deadlines, upcoming or recent events
  - \* Relevant news stories
  - \* Current event topics
  - \* Accomplishments
  - \* Media coverage of your TXGU grant
  - \* Awards or success stories



## Some examples of content include:

FACEBOOK	TWITTER	INSTAGRAM
Being a better online researcher now will make college homework a lot easier. <a href="http://www.sweetsearch.com/TenSteps">http://www.sweetsearch.com/TenSteps</a>	Don't forget @FAFSA deadlines are coming up this week! <a href="https://fafsa.ed.gov/deadlines.htm">https://fafsa.ed.gov/deadlines.htm</a>	Did you know that sound designers make an average annual salary of \$45k to create soundscapes for your favorite films? <a href="http://www.texasgearup.com/discover/sound-designer">http://www.texasgearup.com/discover/sound-designer</a> <i>(Use a picture with copyright permission from a website or pull one from a photo service like Shutterstock).</i>
Parents' roles in their students' college-prep process is crucial. Here's a helpful guide to see how you can help set your student on the path to college success. <a href="http://www.ownyourfuture.com/files/for_parents_section/high_school_parent_guide.pdf">http://www.ownyourfuture.com/files/for_parents_section/high_school_parent_guide.pdf</a>	Want to know how to #standout on those super important #collegeessays? We've got tons of tips: <a href="http://www.collegebasics.com/applying-to-college/admissions-essays/26-seven-ways-to-make-your-college-essay-stand-out.html">http://www.collegebasics.com/applying-to-college/admissions-essays/26-seven-ways-to-make-your-college-essay-stand-out.html</a>	Meet #TXGU: GEAR UP coordinator (insert name, title/role). S/he's here to help get you on track to college. Got any questions about college? Ask us in the comments. <i>(Use a good-quality photo for the person being featured, and be sure to interact with those who respond to the post.)</i>

Successful execution of any social media strategy requires equal parts planning and adaptability. Because events and news are often unplanned, you'll need to be able to adjust and respond based on the needs of the situation. But for a large majority of your posts, they will benefit from being planned anywhere between a week to a month in advance. There are many online tools and templates that can help you plan your social media calendar—a quick Google search will find the template that works best for you.

The best times to post on each platform will vary. The following times are a generalized standard of recommendations across a variety of industries and audiences.

SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORM	BEST TIMES TO POST
<b>Facebook</b> People tend to use Facebook at work, at home on a desktop computer, or on their phones	Wednesdays at 3pm, Thursdays and Fridays from 1-4pm, Saturdays and Sundays from 12-1pm
<b>Twitter</b> Twitter is usually used during downtimes, such as commutes to work or waiting in line	Weekdays from 12-3pm and 5pm
<b>Instagram</b> Since Instagram is made to be used on mobile devices, audiences are almost always online	Anytime Monday-Thursday except between the hours of 3-4pm

To understand the best time to post per platform, it's a good idea to consult the analytics tools associated with each one. For Facebook pages, clicking Insights at the top of the page will show a summary of data, including best times to post. For Twitter, using a free tool like Tweriod will provide valuable insight on the best times to post on your profile. For Instagram, using a free tool like Union Metric's Instagram report will help you find the best times to post your content.

Now you know what and when to post, but how many times per week should you post? Again, there's no easy answer for this, as it will depend on your goals and audience. You'll want to post enough that you'll be on your audience's radar, but you don't want to post too often—which could result in your audience “unfollowing” your social media platform. There's no right answer, but for general purposes, your page should be updated at least twice a week, and no more than once per day (or seven times per week). But the biggest takeaway regarding posting times should be this: More content  $\neq$  more likes, so spend more time crafting great and engaging posts and worry less about how many times to post.



## ENGAGING YOUR AUDIENCE

Social media platforms were created to be a place on the internet where people can interact with each other. So, if you're only posting content and not interacting with your audiences, you're only halfway there. Engagement is essential to any strong social media strategy and is the most effective way to develop interaction and loyalty between you and your audience.

### Here are some must-know tips for engaging with your audiences:

- **Follow and monitor posts from peers, social media influencers (a person, company, or organization that has the ability to affect audiences' thinking in a social community) and other education/college-prep related pages**
- **Stay in tune with what target audiences are**

**talking about and what they're interested in**

- **Ask appropriate advocates to follow your Texas GEAR UP page and have them invite their connections to follow as well**
- **Include social media links on all outreach materials (like pamphlets and flyers)**

But there's more to engagement than just liking someone's photo or replying to a question left on your page. By creating an established voice and tone, your followers will be able to better identify your Texas GEAR UP social media presence. The voice and tone of each of your pages is ultimately up to you, but a good guideline would be to have an educational, professional, informative, empathetic, and approachable voice. Sentences should be casual, conversational, and polite when posting content and interacting with commenters.



## MEASURING YOUR SUCCESS



What does a successful social media channel look like to you? There's no better way to improve performance than to effectively measure success. By outlining some social media goals, observing, and analyzing metrics like page likes, post engagement, or new followers, you'll be able to measure your growth and see if you've met—and exceeded—your social media goals.

The best way to measure this information is through a variety of free online tools, although it's likely you will not need to get on the granular level that many of these tools provide. Facebook Insights and Twitter Analytics are free tools offered by the respective platforms to help you see valuable information like post clicks, impressions, profile visits, and much more. These will likely have all the information you need to track and measure your success on a daily, weekly, monthly, and annual basis.

## BEST PRACTICES BY PLATFORM

The world of social media is constantly evolving, which can definitely make things confusing from time to time. Outlined below are some good habits and best practices to consider when using each platform.

### FACEBOOK

**Follow your school's Facebook policy.** There's a good chance your school has already established rules and guidelines associated with running a Facebook page.

**Establish a posting schedule or strategy.** By knowing what kind of content you want or need to plan and using a posting schedule, you'll be able to schedule posts ahead of time—saving yourself loads of time in the long run.

**Make sure your posts are consistent.** Establishing the type and quality of what you post will help your audience know what kinds of messages to expect from your TXGU grant page.

**When creating content for your page, keep in mind that audience engagement is a large part of your mission.** The more personalized and crafted the message is to your audience, the better response you'll get.

**Always use images and captions when posting, the more exciting and engaging the better.** In fact, Facebook posts with images see 2.3X more engagement than those without images. Video and infographics are also great for including with posts to help increase engagement. It's also worth mentioning, when posts are timely and relevant audiences tend to respond to them better.

### TWITTER

**Engage, engage, engage!** Twitter works best when you create content and interact with your audiences. Think of tweeting like a conversation—it's best when there's more than one person doing the talking.

**Connect through the powers of hashtags.** Try searching hashtags that are relevant to you and your Twitter audience. If you're looking to connect with others in the field of education, you can incorporate hashtags like #edchat, #edumatch, and #futureready into your posts. Bonus points for sharing resources you love (like the many listed on TexasGEARUP.com) with other educators across the Twittersphere.

**Use visuals in your tweets for higher engagement.** It's true: People are three times more likely to engage with a tweet that has a visual image like a photo, video, or GIF.



**When you compose a tweet that starts with an @username, only the people who follow you and that @username will see your tweet—and chances are that's not a lot of people.** A good way to work around this is to put a period before the username or just rephrase your sentence.

**Be careful not to spam.** It's easy to get excited and want to spread your message, but spam is never welcomed by online communities. Using irrelevant hashtags to spread your message won't help—in fact, it's likely to hurt any outreach efforts. The same goes for mentioning all your followers just to draw their attention to something. It's annoying and a good way to lose followers fast. To avoid this, just be sure your tweets are useful, relevant, and free of spam.

## INSTAGRAM

**Ensure every post is visually engaging.** Since Instagram is all about visuals, posting poorly composed or blurry photos won't help you reach your goals. If you're unsure what you want to post or how it should look, take a scroll through some of your favorite Instagram accounts and consider what it is they're doing that makes them stand out. Being able to identify this in others can help you find inspiration for posting your own original content.

**Get your audience involved and gain followers by hosting your own Instagram contest or posting content shared from your audience.** If you choose to share someone else's Instagram post, it's crucial to make sure they're attributed to the post by using their @username.

**Just like Twitter, Instagram's better when you engage with your audience.** By using the explore function (the magnifying glass at the bottom of the mobile app), you can

find trends among your audience, like and comment on others' photos, and find new followers.

**Use those hashtags!** Another parallel with Twitter, hashtags on Instagram are a great way to grow and engage your audience. When posting content, be sure to use relevant hashtags to spread your message further.

**Tag people in your photos and use the geolocation feature when posting images.** This is another fantastic way to connect and grow your audience. If someone or something (like a popular brand) is featured in your photo or was associated with the photo, be sure to tag them—you might even get "regrammed" to a much larger audience. And just like the explore option, the geolocation filter allows people to see photos that were taken at that particular location. When you geotag your photos, the better the chances are that more people will see your post.



## GO FORTH AND IMPLEMENT!

Now that you've got a good understanding of the basics of social media, you're ready to go out and connect with your audience like never before! *A few things to consider for successful implementation of your new social media strategy moving forward:*

- Start considering social media as a vital part of your outreach across all your TXGU audiences
- Include social media at update meetings with staff and board members
- Always include social media as a means to reach your overall goals
- Remember to analyze the success and shortfalls of your strategy regularly and make adjustments for optimum results

## HAPPY POSTING!