

# #NowHiring

THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA  
IN AGENCY RECRUITING



PARTNERSHIP  
FOR PUBLIC SERVICE

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The Partnership for Public Service is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that works to revitalize the federal government by inspiring a new generation to serve and by transforming the way government works. The Partnership teams up with federal agencies and other stakeholders to make our government more effective and efficient. We pursue this goal by:

- Providing assistance to federal agencies to improve their management and operations, and to strengthen their leadership capacity
- Conducting outreach to college campuses and job seekers to promote public service
- Identifying and celebrating government's successes so they can be replicated across government
- Advocating for needed legislative and regulatory reforms to strengthen the civil service
- Generating research on, and effective responses to, the workforce challenges facing our federal government
- Enhancing public understanding of the valuable work civil servants perform

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Despite the more than 20 million applications submitted in 2014 to USAJOBS, the government’s jobs website, not all agency hiring managers are convinced they are getting the best-qualified people. To broaden the search for talented job seekers beyond the USAJOBS site and publicize the appeal of working for the federal government, some forward-thinking human resources managers and public affairs officers are tapping into social media. They hope to draw attention to their agency’s work and get a wider range of people interested in applying for open positions.

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Now is the time for other human resources managers to fire up their computer networks in a similar way. With the rapid growth of social media, federal agencies could be missing out if they are not using social media to recruit top talent, particularly young applicants. As reported in our 2014 *Best Places to Work in the Federal Government*<sup>®</sup> research, only 39 percent of federal employees said their teams were able to attract top talent.

Many agencies are taking advantage of social media to share information and respond to citizens’ needs. Far fewer use these platforms to recruit top talent. The Partnership for Public Service and LinkedIn set out to understand the rules that govern how agencies use social media to recruit potential applicants and explore promising practices used by agency social media and human resources staff.

In addition to interviewing the deputy associate director for recruitment and hiring at the Office of Person-

nel Management and the general counsel at the Office of Government Ethics, we held focus group discussions with 11 social media and human resources professionals from six agencies.

We found varying degrees of social media use across these agencies. Some are active—holding Twitter town halls, participating in social media “Throwback Thursdays” and posting new information several times a day to promote the agency’s work and attract job seekers. Other agencies are more tentative, with officials there concerned about what they can and cannot do on social media. This paper will help clarify what is permissible.

On the following pages, the list of do’s and don’ts for recruiting through social media comes from the Code of Federal Regulations<sup>1</sup> and our interviews.

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<sup>1</sup> 5 C.F.R. §§ 300.401-300.408 (2015)

# Do

- Post all jobs on USAJOBS—which satisfies the requirement for fair and open official public notice—before sharing the position through social media. This avoids giving unfair advantage to applicants who don't have social media accounts and allows your agency to engage on other platforms.
- Use social media when your agency is finding it difficult to attract well-qualified candidates or when you are more likely to find candidates with specific qualifications using social media. Agencies may use social media to recruit for all positions.
- Tell your agency's story on an ongoing basis, illustrating the great work your employees do. It will help you grow your audience and be ready to promote open positions once they're posted on USAJOBS.
- Use good judgment when using personal social media accounts during work hours. Under guidance from the Office of Government Ethics, employees' use of personal social media accounts on official time is allowed if it is "in an honest effort to perform official duties."
- Provide hyperlinks on social media sites that lead the user back to your agency's official website.
- Check with your agency's point of contact for terms of service before the agency uses a new social media platform to make sure your agency has negotiated the proper terms of service. Your agency should have a social media point of contact at the department level.
- Decide which social media platforms make the most sense for your agency rather than trying to join as many as possible.
- Issue guidance about how you want your staff to represent your agency on social media sites.

# Don't

- Violate the Merit Systems Principles. If it is not legal off social media, then it is not legal on social media. For example, don't use race, gender, age or other demographic information found on a job-seeker's social media accounts in a way that could be considered discriminatory.
- Post positions on social media sites that require users to pay fees.
- Give "insider information" to job applicants over social media. You can promote the open position but cannot tell a person how to get hired.
- Refer to your agency or job title on your personal accounts in a way that could suggest the government supports statements you make. When in doubt, add a disclaimer that you are speaking for yourself, not your agency.
- Go it alone if you receive negative comments on your sites. Seek counsel from your public affairs office on the best way to respond.

# Best Practices



# Mix recruitment with storytelling

Create a constant presence on social media. Agencies are in a better position to attract top talent for open positions if they maintain the attention of potential candidates even when the agency is not hiring.

You can generate interest in careers at your agency by using social media to share stories illustrating the work your employees do. When prospective applicants understand the agency's activities better, by reading and relating to posted stories, they are more likely to get a stronger impression of the work than they would from skimming a job announcement.

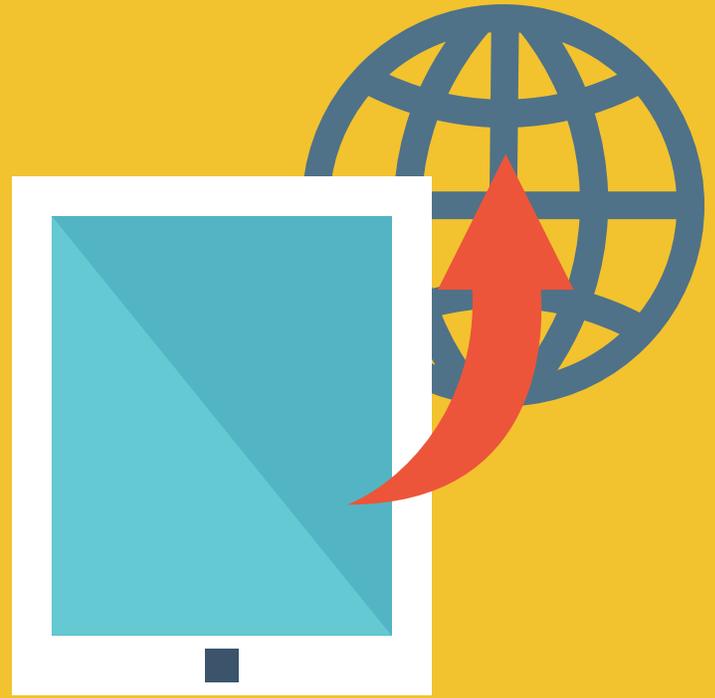
For example, the Department of Veterans Affairs blog, Vantage Point, started drawing much more attention when it was reorganized to look like a news site and started posting photos of employees at work instead of just publishing lists of available jobs. The blog has a section called "VA Careers" on its landing page, along with sections about benefits, health and the latest news.

VA's blog and website also link to Instagram, Flickr and other agency social media accounts, including its Facebook page, which features moving "veteran of the day" stories each week. "'Show not tell' has worked," said Rey Leal, public affairs specialist at VA. "Showing the importance, mission and specifics is more important than

lists, which is what the careers-only blog looked like before," he said. "Recruiting is a pitch (as in) 'imagine yourself in this job.'"

The blog covers everything from new training programs for veterans transitioning back to civilian life to a day in the life of a veteran turned VA recruiter in New York. The stories posted on social media sites highlight the breadth of VA opportunities. For example, the stories tell of doctors who work in VA hospitals, recruiters who hire healthcare professionals and employees in VA facilities across the country interacting with their local communities.

The National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency maintains an active social media presence despite working with sensitive information. The social media team at NGA posts imagery, news, agency products such as maps, and other publicly releasable information to social media to highlight the agency's contributions as a combat support and intelligence agency. The team posts regularly on certain themes, such as "Throwback Thursday," which highlights vintage photos from agency archives, and "Geointeresting," which offers definitions for geological terms. A "Job of the Week" post highlights diverse agency career opportunities.



## Use social media strategically to reach a larger applicant pool

Identify ways your agency can reach the largest possible social media audience, whether it's by retweeting USAJOBS postings and mentioning USAJOBS in your posts, or by targeting specialized audiences through user groups. Repost your social media job information strategically and use content you have already created to help your organization engage more prospective candidates with existing resources.

Connect with a wide-ranging set of professional interest groups that have members your agency is hoping to attract, such as professionals in technology, medicine or other mission-critical fields. Use social media to share information about opportunities at your agency. "At some point, you can't hit everyone by recruiting in person and going to schools," said Leal. "But social media can." VA uses the LinkedIn option for creating specialized groups. There are groups of veterans, female firefighters and others that participants and VA use to network, get new ideas and "do some major recruiting," he said.

The Bureau of Land Management boosts the value of its job vacancy postings on USAJOBS by tweeting daily to spread the word about career opportunities. Once a new job is listed on USAJOBS, the bureau posts the in-

formation on its @BLMcareers Twitter account, making sure to tag USAJOBS. Through this strategy, the information reaches USAJOBS' 20,600 followers as well as the bureau's followers. "Not only are we sharing federal job opportunities, we are promoting the work of employees, recognizing interns and their experiences, supporting partnerships and joining in ongoing campaigns to engage in conversations related to veterans, STEM and more," said Samantha Storms, public affairs specialist for BLM's National Office of New Media.

The bureau also uses social media to highlight the work of women in STEM occupations with the goal of spreading awareness about the bureau's opportunities among potential applicants the agency hopes to attract. The bureau's My Public Lands Tumblr account features pictures and stories about female employees in STEM fields with the hashtag #WomeninSTEM. These posts illustrate diverse opportunities, for example, showing interns in Alaska studying invasive plants and a wildlife biologist tracking an endangered owl species. "Our behind-the-scenes features have been very well received and help explain the work we do related to land management and natural resources," Storms said.



## Break through silos and create agency positions that bridge public relations and recruiting duties

Make sure staff who lead agency recruiting efforts are in contact with employees who specialize in social media, who often work in agency public affairs offices. Elements of recruiting cross into the public affairs arena and vice versa. Having at least one employee whose responsibilities include both social media and recruiting can help agencies add recruiting to their social media strategy.

It was helpful for the Bureau of Land Management to hire someone to work for both the human capital management and the public affairs offices. Storms' multifac-

eted role—working with recruitment and retention staff, civil rights, diversity and inclusion, and communications and social media—allows her to have a broader view and assist the agency with using new media to share BLM's story and attract top talent.

Both positions—human resources and public affairs—require distinct skills, said Sue Shumate, chief of talent acquisition at National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency. “Many people believe they can do [social media], but like recruiting, it takes a special talent to do it well.”



## Encourage frequent updates and a two-way information exchange through social media

Accept and respond to questions on social media. Publicly addressing individuals' comments and concerns soon after those concerns appear shows that your agency is transparent and active online, and that your social media platforms are a good forum for sharing information. Rapid responses and regular updates are crucial for bringing traffic to your sites.

Employees who manage social media accounts for the Department of Veterans Affairs regularly monitor and respond to comments on those accounts. When staff first started posting on social media, some wanted to delete negative comments from users. Now, employees leave most negative comments and respond to them constructively, showing that VA pays attention to activity on the agency's social media platforms. "If we're afraid of negative comments, we'll never get anywhere," said Leal.

That policy also applies to posts from people who criticize the job-application process. Staff address as many of the concerns from potential applicants as possible. In addition, the site is now updated two or three times a day. Before, "you could go there for a whole week and not see anything different," said Leal. "But now, it looks like a steady flow of information."

The National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency has processes and safeguards in place that guide interactions with social media audiences. The agency held a Twitter town hall on student internship opportunities, for example, that was advertised on its Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn pages, with event reminders posted weeks in advance. To make sure the event was a success, the agency took questions posted on social media in advance to stimulate audience discussion.



## Facilitate the transition from social media platforms to USAJOBS

Think of ways to use social media to help candidates navigate the application process on USAJOBS. While agencies can—and should—use social media to generate interest in career opportunities, applicants still need to apply for jobs through USAJOBS. For many, the USAJOBS application process can seem challenging or complicated, and this additional step deters some promising candidates from applying to positions.

Consider posting information about the steps involved in the USAJOBS process, including creating a federal resume and answering multiple-choice or short-answer questions. The Consumer Financial Protection

Bureau, a relatively new agency, has a LinkedIn Career Page that includes descriptions of open jobs and a two-minute video describing what the agency does. You can also find a wealth of information on how to find a federal job on the Partnership's [Go Government site](#).

Providing information upfront makes the process more transparent and gives applicants a better idea of the information they will need to prepare to apply for a position at your agency. Social media also gives a forum for responding directly to posts and comments from applicants, where appropriate.

# Conclusion

Many resourceful agency and human resources managers seeking to recruit top candidates for job vacancies have turned to social media to broaden and diversify their pool of applicants. Agency hiring managers who have had difficulty filling positions may find that branching out into social media can provide a new and useful recruiting resource.

The online tools are out there, and current regulations allow agencies to take advantage of them. With a list of do's and don'ts in hand, now is as good a time as any to start exploring these opportunities.

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