

Tips for Working with Social Media Influencers

A how-to guide for nonprofit organizations

This guide is meant to be a holistic resource for nonprofit advocacy organizations that are interested in collaborating with social media influencers. It includes complete step-by-step tips such as:

- How to conduct research and outreach for potential influencer partners
- Guidance for influencer contract negotiations
- Tips for production and post-production processes
- Distribution and amplification strategies

While no single document will encompass every scenario or challenge that can arise with influencer content production, we hope this guide will provide the basic framework for your organization to begin the valuable work of influencer collaboration.

Part 1

Find your influencer partner

Step 1 Search for Relevant Influencers

- **Use Influencer Search Tools:** Use platforms like BuzzSumo, Upfluence, or Klear to find influencers based on keywords relevant to your nonprofit's mission. Social media platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter also have in-app search tools.
- **Monitor Hashtags and Communities:** Identify key hashtags related to your cause and check for influencers who frequently post about those topics. Search for online communities who engage with content that is relevant to your work.
- **Look for Non-traditional Influencers:** Consider activists, bloggers, community leaders, and experts who may not have large followings but have high credibility and engagement within specific niche audiences.

Step 2 Analyze Influencer's Audience

- **Use Social Media Analytics Tools:** Platforms like Instagram and YouTube offer built-in analytics tools (Instagram Insights, YouTube Analytics) where influencers can share demographic data about their audience, including age, location, and gender.
- **Use Third-Party Analytics:** Tools like HypeAuditor, Social Blade, and Sprout Social can provide deeper insights into an influencer's followers' demographics.
- **Review Engagement with Similar Causes:** Look at how the influencer's followers interact with content related to causes similar to yours. Are they actively commenting, sharing, and showing support?

Step 3 Measure Influencer Engagement Rates

- **Calculate Engagement Rate:** Engagement rate is typically measured as $[(\text{likes} + \text{comments}) / \text{total followers}] * 100$. Use tools like Phlanx or manually track this data to assess the level of audience interaction.
- **Look Beyond Follower Count:** Engagement rates give a clearer picture of how engaged an audience is and is more valuable than sheer follower numbers.
- **Analyze Comments and Quality of Engagement:** Read through the comments to see if they reflect genuine interest, or if the engagement feels generic. *Quality interactions often matter more than the quantity of likes.*

Step 4 Evaluate Authenticity and Brand Alignment

- **Review Past Collaborations:** Investigate previous partnerships. Did the influencer work with similar causes? Was the collaboration successful?
- **Assess Authenticity:** If you partner with a creator who is not aligned with your project's goals, the result may be disappointing for your campaign, and lack alignment with their brand. Look to work with influencers who already talk about your cause or related issues, and who have a trustworthy reputation. For influencers who reach broader audiences outside of the social justice space, it may take more time and effort to assess if they are authentically values aligned.
- **Gauge Long-term Potential:** Ideally, influencers should be able to support your cause beyond a one-time campaign. Evaluate whether they show a long-term commitment to social impact and activism. If a good relationship is established, they can help promote your advocacy work in future campaigns as well.
- **Vet Your Potential Partner:** Review the content that has been posted on the channel to see if the influencer has posted anything problematic or misaligned with your organization's values. Also, be sure to run their name through a search engine to identify any events in their past that could pose a challenge for collaboration.

Part 2

Influencer Outreach

If within budget, it is always a lighter lift and a smoother process to utilize influencer agencies to facilitate connections and collaborations. However, if an influencer agency is not within budget, we recommend the following:

- Have a clear ask for what you are looking for. Create a clear plan for the content and proposal for what you are hoping to produce with them, whether it's more scripted or viewed as a partnership role with marketing development.
- Create a creative **pitch deck** that has your organization's branding
 - Tip: use the example here as a guide to creating a template in your own branding!
- Craft personalized outreach messages to send via email or social media platforms to engage potential influencers. **Here is a template for email outreach:**

Email Outreach Template

**Subject: [Influencer Name] x [Org Name]
Potential Collaboration**

Hi [Influencer's Name],

I hope you're doing well! My name is [Your Name], and I'm reaching out on behalf of [Nonprofit Organization], an organization dedicated to [brief description of the nonprofit's mission and cause]. We're excited to be embarking on an important campaign, and we believe your voice could help us reach an even wider and more engaged audience.

Our current initiative aims to [brief description of the campaign goals], focusing on [specific aspect of the target audience or cause]. We're looking to connect with influential voices like yours to help amplify this message and make a meaningful impact.

We'd love to explore ways you could be involved in this effort, which might include:

- Sharing campaign content across your platforms
- Participating in a [virtual event, storytelling initiative, panel, etc.]
- Collaborating on creative ideas to raise awareness around [campaign focus]

As a recipient of support from [name any notable partners or funders], and in collaboration with partners like [any key collaborators], we believe this campaign will resonate with your audience and align with the values you champion.

I've attached a creative brief for more details, and I'd be happy to answer any questions or chat further about how we could work together.

Thank you for considering this opportunity. We'd be honored to collaborate with you!

Best regards,
[Your Full Name]
[Your Position]
[Nonprofit Organization]
[Contact Information]

Part 3

Contract Negotiations

When negotiating a contract with a social media influencer, it is important to establish clear expectations, compensation, and deliverables through legally-sound contracts.

Tip: You can find sample contracts via [Google](#), Use [Contract Maker Platforms](#), or ask [ChatGPT](#) for a sample contract. [Here](#) is a sample contract as well

Step 1 Define Clear Goals and a Budget

- **Set Campaign Objectives:** Determine the specific type of content you want to produce with the influencer (an Instagram reel, YouTube video, etc.).
- **Create a Budget:** Even though nonprofits often have limited funds, it's essential to set aside a specific budget for influencer partnerships, including compensation, product giveaways, or other incentives.
- **In-Kind and Non-Monetary Options:** Consider alternative forms of compensation, such as shoutouts on your social media, event invitations, or exclusive content for the influencer.

Step 2 Tailor Your Compensation Offer

- **Compensation Based on Scope:** Tailor your offer according to the scope of work (number of posts, platform use, or event participation). Influencers often charge based on follower count, engagement rate, and time commitment.
- **Monetary vs. Value-Based Offers:** If your budget is limited, offer additional benefits like increased exposure, co-creating content, or exclusive access to certain initiatives. Some influencers may be open to pro bono work or reduced rates for nonprofits.
- **Negotiate Fairly:** Aim for a win-win agreement. While you may want to reduce costs, it is also important to respect the influencer's time, effort, and platform value.

Step 3 Create a Clear Contract

- **Outline Deliverables:** Specify the number of posts, platforms to be used, messaging, hashtags, and any visual guidelines.
- **Define Timeline:** Set clear deadlines for content creation, posting, and any review processes.
- **Payment Terms:** Agree on payment methods (e.g., lump sum, installments) and specify the timeline for compensation (e.g., 50% upfront, 50% after completion).
- **Metrics and Reporting:** Include tracking and reporting requirements so that you can measure the success of the campaign.
- **Usage & Ownership:** Specify clearly your desired usage and ownership rights. Ideally your organization will be the sole and exclusive owner of all rights, titles, and interests in and to the results and proceeds of the content created, including all copyrights and other intellectual property rights. You can grant the influencer a limited license to use the content solely as required to provide the services as set forth in the contract, and set out terms for whitelisting or “boosting” of posts with paid media.

Step 4 Maintain Open Communication

- **Set Expectations Early:** Be clear about your organization’s goals, the tone of messaging, and any specific guidelines.
- **Provide Feedback and Flexibility:** Stay open to feedback from the influencer and allow for flexibility in content creation to ensure authenticity.
- **Express Gratitude:** Build lasting relationships by acknowledging the influencer’s contribution and offering to collaborate on future campaigns.

Producing Content Collaboratively

Step 1 Develop the Creative Concept and Script

- **Collaborative Briefing:** Create a document that lays out your creative vision. It should include details like intended tone, style, key talking points, and visual elements. Schedule time with your influencer partner to review the concept, and encourage them to contribute ideas to ensure authenticity. Remember, they know their audience, so they may have ideas for how to better reach them.
- **Content Type:** Decide whether the content will be an explainer video, interview, testimonial, or something more creative like a vlog.
- **Script & Storyboard:** If the video involves a script, draft a script with the influencer's approval. If the content is non-scripted, make sure the influencer is working off of core, agreed-upon talking points. Be sure to include a shot list as well, where you can list out different visuals that are critical to capture in order to tell your story.

Step 2 Plan the Shoot (Pre-Production)

The format of your content, whether it is video, photography, graphic design or just text, will greatly influence how you produce it. Video tends to be the most intensive content production format. Video production can be shot on someone's personal phone, or can scale up to be quite complicated and extensive. With influencer partners, the range is very broad and is completely dependent upon the influencer's style.

Below are recommendations for a video production that requires some, but not full, production support. If you are hoping to do a more complex video production, we recommend you hire production professionals.

- **Location Scouting:** A crucial decision in planning your content production is to decide whether to film on-site or remotely. Remote shoots are usually much easier to coordinate logistically, but sometimes a story requires footage that needs to be captured at a specific location. If you are shooting a video or conducting photography, it is always best to physically go to the site ahead of time and “scout” the location. This allows you to identify the best areas for the production to shoot, and identify any challenges the site may pose. Elements that may be helpful to keep an eye out for when scouting include:
 - Logistical Concerns: Parking, access to restrooms, access to stores or restaurants, distance between locations, access to power sources, any people or images that could require rights clearances
 - Creative concerns: Setting for the story, light sources, noise issues that could arise, etc.
- **Team & Equipment:** If you are able to and the shoot requires it, it can be greatly beneficial to hire or assign a production team, including a director, camera operator, and sound engineer if needed. Ensure you have the necessary equipment, such as cameras, microphones, and lighting.
- **Scheduling:** Align everyone’s schedules and confirm all participants, including the influencer, have time set aside for the shoot.
- **Permissions:** If filming in public or private spaces, ensure you have any necessary permissions, including appearance releases for people featured in the video. Generic appearance release templates can be found online.
- **Call Sheet:** Create a document with all of the important logistical information for your shoot in one place. This would include everyone’s contact information who will be on site, the shoot location, and the shoot schedule. Make sure to share this document with all of the stakeholders prior to the shoot.
- **Shot list:** Develop a list of the different shot frames and angles to support set direction.

Step 3 Execute the Shoot (Production)

- **Day of the Shoot:** Ensure everyone is on time and prepared. Have your visual references, script, location and appearance releases, and shot list ready to guide the production team.
- **Engage the Creator:** Encourage the influencer to engage naturally with the content while hitting the campaign's key points.
- **B-Roll & Secondary Shots:** Capture additional footage or photos (e.g., behind-the-scenes moments, audience reactions, or general shots of the location) to use for social media teasers or future content.
- **Monitor & Adjust:** Have a designated person on site monitoring the script, or talking points and content for consistency with your key messages. Be ready to make adjustments and suggestions in real time if needed.

Post-production

It is highly recommended for post-production that you work with someone who has professional experience in editing and an understanding of post-production processes. Sometimes that person is the influencer partner themselves. The editor will help guide the post-production process, which should involve an agreed-upon number of feedback rounds. While the editor will execute the final product, it is critical as the non-profit sponsor of the content that you advocate for your voice and messaging throughout the process, including in post-production.

Step 1 Organize and Review Footage

This will traditionally be managed by the Editor of the project.

- **Sort and Label:** Import all raw footage, audio files, and graphics into an organized folder structure (by date, type, or scene). Label each clip clearly.
- **Initial Review:** Watch through all content to note the best takes, important moments, or any unexpected gems captured during the shoot. Note the timecode or the timing in the video clip of your favorite moments that you believe should be included in the final cut. Those are called “selects.”
- **Backup:** Create multiple backups of your footage on external drives or cloud storage to prevent data loss.

Step 2 Create an Edit Outline

- **Script-Based Edits:** If you used a script, this part is easy. The editor should be able to follow the script and pull the clips that align with it in the footage.

- **Non-Scripted Edits:** For projects that are not scripted (more conversational videos for example) the post-production edit is really where the story is put together. For these instances, it's important to ensure that the video aligns with the intended message, whether it's an emotional appeal, educational, or a call to action. Make sure to include any special segments featuring the influencer's unique message or tone.
- **Highlight Key Messages:** Identify your intended message or goal for the project.
- **Create a Paper Cut:** After reviewing the footage and identifying your selects, you will create what is called a "paper cut." These are essentially the written out version of how you would like the video edited for the final piece of content. {example here} Make sure your key messages are central in the papercut, and that you are using the creator's voice to amplify it.

*Some influencers or editors prefer to create their own papercuts, or to edit directly with the footage, working solely off of the talking points or selects. Whether you create a papercut or not will depend upon your partner, but we have found at Define American that creating a papercut is a preferred step in the process when possible, to ensure alignment before the edit begins.

Step 3 Editing the Footage

Before the edit begins, an agreed-upon process for feedback should be established, with a set number of rounds of feedback and a clear approvals process.

- **Rough Cut:** The "rough cut" of a project is an early draft of the edit that is meant to show the basic structure and flow of the video. Do not worry if your rough cut does not "feel" quite right yet when you watch it. Often, the elements that make content resonate with audiences are added later in the process. For the rough cut, feedback should be focused more on the content of the edit, not as much on its style.

- **Fine Cut:** Once the editor has received feedback on the rough cut, they will do another pass on the edit to incorporate that feedback. At this point in the process, there may be multiple more rounds of feedback, depending upon what post-production processes were agreed upon during the contracting phase. For influencer content, we often find that three rounds of feedback suffice. The second to last cut is called the “fine cut” and this is where the content should be relatively close to being locked. This is an appropriate time to dig into stylistic feedback.
- **Final Cut:** The “final cut” is the last step of the editing process. The video should be locked, and no more rounds of feedback should be needed at this point. Be sure to secure final approval from the creator, stakeholders, and any involved legal teams regarding rights and content usage.
- **Types of Feedback for Edits:** Feedback for edits should always include the timing of the moment you are commenting on, and be as specific as possible. It should also be within the realm of possibility to fix in post-production. Remember, the footage is what it is, and no editor can (or should) create dialogue or action that did not really happen on camera. For example:
 - Helpful feedback: “Let’s cut the line “I don’t have one” at 1:02-1:04”
 - Unhelpful feedback: “Let’s have our subject say something different than what she said on set- like ‘I love that!’”
- **Streamlining Feedback:** It’s important to note that sometimes feedback from multiple sources may conflict, and cause confusion for the editor. It is always best to go through the process of internal approvals, and to streamline the feedback before it is delivered to the editor, so the direction is clear.
- **Collecting Feedback for Edits:** Do not wait until the project is nearly complete to share the edit with important stakeholders for feedback. If the influencer you’re working with is not the editor, make sure to share the edits with them as the piece is coming together, along with other important stakeholders. Make adjustments as needed to take into account the feedback and ensure that while all parties are heard, your ultimate goal for the project is achieved. You can use tools like Frame I.O, Dropbox, or Wipster to make it easier for multiple parties to give feedback simultaneously.

- **Add Graphics and Branding:** If you are hoping to increase brand recognition with this piece of content, make sure to include your organization's logo, campaign hashtags, and any key visuals (e.g., donor messages, action buttons).
- **Incorporate Influencer Branding:** While it's important to represent your organization's goal, try to be as welcoming and collaborative as possible with your influencer's input into the project. They are the experts on their own content, and the fact that they have amassed a large audience suggests that they are likely expert storytellers as well. Always consider their feedback and approach the collaboration with openness and respect.

Step 4 Amplification & Distribution Strategy

1. Package your content:

- One of the most valuable elements of working with an influencer is to reach their audience. Work with your influencer partner to ensure that they are posting the content on their channel, and at a time where they see the most engagement.
- **Tailor Content for Platforms:** Adjust the final video for various platforms (YouTube, Instagram, TikTok), ensuring it meets different aspect ratios, lengths, and captioning needs.
- **Maximize your Content:** One video production can generate a great deal of products, and can have far more impact than a single post. Looking at your content consider pulling visual stills, compelling quotes or audio clips to use as supplemental additional content.
- **Thumbnail:** If you are posting on a platform that utilizes thumbnails, ensure that you choose an eye-catching and engaging visual to draw in your audience.

2. Launch Your Content:

- **Launch Plan:** Schedule the release of your project based on the campaign timeline, coordinate with the creator for cross-promotion, and track engagement metrics post-launch to assess impact. Make sure to utilize any agreed upon hashtags or tags for the product.

■ **Social Media Integration:**

- Share content featuring the influencer on all of your nonprofit's social media channels. Tag the influencer and encourage them to do the same. Use relevant hashtags to increase visibility and engagement.
- Create teaser clips or behind-the-scenes content from the influencer's shoot, emphasizing the collaboration's message. This not only generates excitement but also keeps the audience engaged.
- Post a countdown to the influencer's content release on your channels to build anticipation and drive traffic.

■ **Email Newsletters:**

- If you have a newsletter for your organization, you can use it to highlight the influencer collaboration in your listserv, including insights from the influencer about why they support your cause. Consider featuring a "Spotlight" section to showcase their contributions and insights.
- Include direct links to the influencer's content and your campaign's landing page. Encourage recipients to engage with the content and share it within their networks.
- Provide subscribers with exclusive behind-the-scenes content, such as interviews or Q&As with the influencer, to foster a deeper connection with the campaign.

■ **Encouraging Amplification:**

- Ask influencers to share the campaign within their professional networks, emphasizing how their involvement can inspire others to support the cause. This can extend your reach far beyond your existing audience.
- Provide influencers with shareable graphics, captions, and specific hashtags to maintain messaging consistency and encourage their followers to engage.

- **Create Collaborative Content:**
 - Consider hosting joint live sessions, webinars, or Instagram takeovers where the influencer discusses the campaign and interacts with their audience. This direct engagement can increase visibility and trust.
 - Encourage influencers to share their personal experiences with your organization, including any visits to your facilities or events, to create authentic content that resonates with their audience.
- **Additional Assets:**
 - Please see this [Social Media Boosting Guide](#) and these [Email Marketing Engagement Tips](#) for additional guidance.

Conclusion

Influencer-led content has tremendous potential for reaching mass audiences with important messages and information. This guide is intended to provide your nonprofit organization with insights and helpful tips for pursuing those collaborations. However, just like with any relationship, each influencer collaboration will be different. We encourage you to utilize this guide as a reference when helpful, but also to trust your partners and your own expertise. The most important element in any influencer collaboration will be the trust you build with your partners.

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