

Twitter as a Tool for Social Change

By Rachel L. West, LMSW
ACOSA Board Member

Twitter is a micro blogging platform that is currently used by 310 million people each month ([source](#)). It has the potential to be a powerful advocacy and community organizing tool. Twitter can also be a handy personal branding tool.

Currently 100% of the United States Senate is on Twitter as are 97% of the House of Representatives and 99% of state governors ([source](#)). Additionally many statehouses have taken steps over the past few years to make it easier for legislators to communicate with constituents through social networking platforms including Twitter. In fact many statehouses have twitter accounts that post hearing calendars, floor activity and voting results ([source](#)).

Twitter can also be used as a community organizing and education tool. With 310 million active users, community organizers now have an efficient tool for connecting with community members. This is especially useful when running a statewide, national, or international campaign.

How to Get Started

If you're not already registered; setting up a Twitter profile is easy.

1. Go to twitter.com
2. Pick a user name. This will be your twitter handle. Try to keep it short.
3. Choose a profile photo. Headshots work best. People are more likely to follow an account whose profile picture is a person's face. Suggested dimensions are 400x400 pixels.
4. Set a Header Photo. Suggested dimensions are 1,500x500 pixels.

The Basics

- For now Tweets are limited to 140 characters. This includes **mentions**, **links**, and **hashtags**.
- To **follow** an account, click the follow button on the profile page. You will now get tweets from them. Anyone who follows you will also see all your tweets. To privately communicate with someone you can message them.
- **Mentions** enable you to communicate directly with another account. Using the "@" sign in front of the username allows you to mention someone in a tweet, to privately message them, and to link to your profile.

Ex: [@UserName](#) thank you.

- The **hashtag** “#” sign in front of a word or words, links tweets together. Hashtags help reach a broader audience and have conversations about a particular topic. Hashtags are employed for Twitter chats. It allows a group of people who may not follow each other to participate in a conversation. Hashtags can be placed anywhere in a tweet.

Ex: Tonight’s **#MacroSW** chat is about breaking down advocacy silos.

- You can share links in a tweet. Because links count in the 140 character limit (this may change soon) if a link is too long you should shorten it using a service such as bitly.com or Google Link Shortener.
- When you share someone’s tweet it is called **retweeting**.
- **Quoting** allows you to comment directly on someone else’s tweet.
- **Reply** enables you to respond to a tweet. For example someone asks you a question you would use the reply button to respond.

Twitter Chats

Twitter chats are conversations about a particular topic. They use hashtags to enable everyone to follow along and interact with each other.

When well planned chats can be used as a “town hall” by organizations, government agencies or elected officials; they can be used as a community organizing or educational tool. They can also be used for professional networking purposes.

Some chats are a onetime deal. Others take place on a regular basis. For example, the #MacroSW chat takes place every Thursday at 9:00 PM EST. You can read through the chat archives at macrosw.com.

Resources:

[Twitter Terminology](#)

[The Twitter glossary](#)

[Social Media Advocacy](#)

[Rapid Response Replay: How a Twitter Campaign Helped Susan Sarandon ‘Get’ Paid Sick Days](#) (Case Study)

Featherstone, L. (2012). CAUGHT IN THE WEB: Occupy the Internet. New Labor Forum, 21(2), 109-111. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org.proxy.library.stonybrook.edu/stable/43681986>

[Black Lives Matter](#)

Anatomy of a Tweet

