

Social Media Communications Protocols

The 11 Most Important Rules



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Our goal is to create and nurture an environment where staff is empowered to contribute to a lively online conversation about preservation. Following these simple rules will allow the Trust as an organization to be comfortable with participating in these unstructured discussions.

Note: The majority of blog posts and comments are considered to be personal communication. Unless you are authorized to speak for the organization on a specific topic, they are not intended to be official communications on behalf of the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

1. **Be nice.** There is nothing to be gained by insulting people personally, engaging in flame wars, or otherwise being hateful. Polite, intelligent, thoughtful posts and comments, however, are to be expected.
2. **Add value.** Before you post or comment, ask yourself if what you're about to say adds anything of value to the conversation. If you're merely agreeing with previous posters or re-hashing previously-made points, perhaps you don't need to be addressing that issue.
3. **Link to your sources.** Linking provides readers with valuable additional information. It is also the best way to respect copyright, as it allows people to see the words cited in their original context.
4. **Be transparent.** If you need to go back and edit a post or comment, note the update clearly. (Online, this is generally done by ~~striking through text~~ and replacing it.) If you are commenting on a preservation issue, indicate in your response that you work at the National Trust for Historic Preservation. If you are not authorized to be the organization's voice on a topic, it is appropriate to say that, while you work here, these are strictly your personal opinions.
5. **Obey the style guide.** When writing for an audience, little things like consistent and correct punctuation, grammar, and terminology are critical to being perceived as an authority.
6. **Use images.** The adage that a picture is worth a thousand words is especially true on the Internet, which is very much a visual medium.

7. **Follow the law/respect copyright.** If something is illegal in the offline world (libel, defamation, copyright infringement) it's illegal online, too.
8. **Keep secrets.** If you know of embargoed information regarding a subject, don't share it. If you don't know if something is secret, or are unsure on the Trust's stance on a subject, please talk to your boss.
9. **Use work time.** Reading, posting, and commenting on blogs is expected to be a normal part of your work day. Just don't make it your whole day.
10. **It's OK to disagree with the powers that be.** You're not expected to be a puppet, but if you disagree with the Trust's official position, always keep rules 1-3 in mind when crafting your post.
11. **Contact communications.** If you receive a media inquiry in response to a post or comment you have written, contact the media relations office (Jan Rothschild, jan_rothschild@nthp.org, 202-588-6103 and Nord Wennerstrom, nord_wennerstrom@nthp.org, 202-588-6380) *before* you make any statement. Once your words hit the MSM (mainstream media), it becomes official Trust communication, and therefore must be treated as such.

And... if 11 points are just too much to remember, keep in mind that the guiding principle is:

Don't be stupid. The basic rules and regulations that govern your offline workday also apply online.