



Piloting Dissemination and Advocacy of Peer Support through Social Media: Peers for Progress Recent Effort and Lessons Learned

Social media tools provide opportunities to advance dissemination and advocacy of peer support. However, peer support programs and organizations can benefit from understanding how to use these tools in order to produce intended impact. Coinciding with the recent launch of our new website (<http://www.peersforprogress.org>), Peers for Progress has also made a concerted effort to increase our social media presence. This article highlights our recent effort piloting social media strategies, as well as shares initial lessons learned.

As outlined in the [CDC's guide to social media writing](#), we hope to take advantage of these social media tools to “*expand our reach, foster engagement, and increase access to credible, science-based health messages.*” Peers for Progress has chosen to focus on blogging and Facebook to present two different kinds of information. Facebook allows us to highlight local, national and international news stories related to peer support, funding opportunities published online and links to academic reports and presentations produced by other organizations and institutions. These stories are generally posted to draw attention and commentary and allow our followers to get a complete story by following the link.



Blogging offers us an opportunity to develop our own unique content, express commentary on issues in the field of peer support, and provides a venue to comment on current topics in a format that allows quick publication. Compared to Facebook, blogs provide a more in depth look at peer support topics and issues and often cite a number of external news sources as part of a larger discussion.

In an effort to take advantage of these outlets to engage those interested in peer support, we have dramatically increased posts on the [Peers for Progress Facebook page](#)

and the [Peers for Progress Idea Exchange Blog](#). Instead of one monthly post on the Facebook and occasional posts on the Blog, we are maintaining a minimum of 3 stories of interest per week on Facebook, and one article per week on the Blog. We also encourage our Grantees, Global Network Members and others interested in peer support to engage and contribute to this effort such as “liking” our Facebook Page and writing Blogs. For example, Maurits van Pelt, Director of MoPo Tsyo Patient Information Centre in Cambodia, wrote [a 3 part series on integration and sustainability of peer support programs](#).



Peers for Progress

Peer Support Around the World

A program of the American Academy of Family Physicians Foundation

Topic Spotlight

Initial lessons learned have emerged throughout this process:

- Our Facebook page has turned out to be a great way to cultivate workforce development by engaging young professionals to share their experiences as new workers in peer support research and practice. For example, recent posts highlighted blogs written by two Masters students currently working on peer support with Village Health Workers in Thailand. By using the Facebook medium, we were able to make an entire new audience aware of the experiences of our students and gained many new graduate student followers. Further engagement between current students and recent graduates provides an avenue for organizations and research projects to connect for potential employment and volunteer experiences.
- Identifying interests of our target audiences is really important for expanding our “reach”. Recognizing that many programs and organizations utilizing peer support approaches are under the radar, we intend to include a wide variety of topics in order to get their attention. For example, we have featured commentaries on the Affordable Care Act on the [Facebook Page](#), and used the Blog to dissect [peer support and community health workers policy](#) in the US.
- It is noted that maintaining a social media presence requires ongoing dedicated staff time. By consistently finding and sharing content that is of interest to our readers, Peers for Progress gains increased exposure beyond an initial group of fans. If a story become very popular and is shared by users, friends of friends on Facebook see our stories appear in their newsfeed. Since graduate students, researchers and project managers often have some friends with similar vocations and interests, this represents an opportunity to increase our audience and support for peer support programs at an international level.
- Although information on how to use social media to most benefit an organization are beyond the scope of this spotlight, several resources are available on the web. We recommend exploring the Community Tool Box’s guide to [“using social media for digital advocacy”](#), [“10 tips for using non-profits on Facebook”](#) and the [CDC’s social media guidelines and best practices](#).

Overall, our increased focus on Facebook and blogging gives Peers for Progress another opportunity to accomplish our mission goals of promoting peer support as a key part of health, health care, and prevention around the world and accelerating the availability of best practices in peer support. As we are still learning how to better our approaches, we encourage our readers and affiliates to help us with this process by sharing your suggestions/experience, as well as following and contributing to our [Idea Exchange Blog](#) and [Facebook page](#).