social media monitoring for emergency managers

a comprehensive guide

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introduction

The purpose of this project is to conduct a field scan of social media monitoring efforts undertaken by state and county government emergency management offices across the country. Our research focuses on Virtual Operation Support Teams (VOSTs), which are teams of trained professionals and volunteers who maintain and monitor digital platforms in order to gather, analyze, and communicate information during an emergency. These organizations provided a good framework to see how social media monitoring groups support on-site emergency management professionals.

Central New York Emergency Management organizations are interested in learning more about how to monitor social media during an emergency situation. To understand social media monitoring efforts, we conducted interviews with nearly 20 emergency management experts in the United States and other countries including the United Kingdom. In addition, we collected supplemental resources like experts' reports and presentations.

The report is structured through three key stages about monitoring social media before, during, and after an emergency. Each phase includes suggestions for implementation, key lessons learned, and examples.

From our research, we hope to improve understandings about how social media can be utilized during emergency situations from technical and non-technical standpoints. Our team aims to use the VOST framework as a guiding structure for emergency management organizations in Central New York. We also looked at how emergency management organizations can implement low-budget strategies, when they are not able to hire consultants or use other expensive tools. By sharing best practices and key challenges, we hope to provide useful information for emergency managers to better understand how they can use social media before, during, and after emergencies.

Social media is fundamentally changing how citizens communicate about emergencies. Although there are some concerns about the credibility of the information on social media, monitoring and vetting strategies are available to mitigate risks. The experts we interviewed use social media to communicate about a variety of different topics including: community health, infrastructure damage, social unrest, and natural disasters. For example, social media teams were activated in Los Angeles for wildfires; in New York when the East Village building collapsed; in Hawaii during tropical storms; in Ohio to promote Amber Alerts; and in Oregon to share health information about Ebola. Throughout these different examples, social media was used to monitor emergency management information, dispel rumors, and amplify the truth.

potential social media use areas

- Monitoring emergency information
- Understanding the public's reality
- Understanding feelings about an event
- Dispelling rumors
- Clearing up confusion
- Amplifying the truth

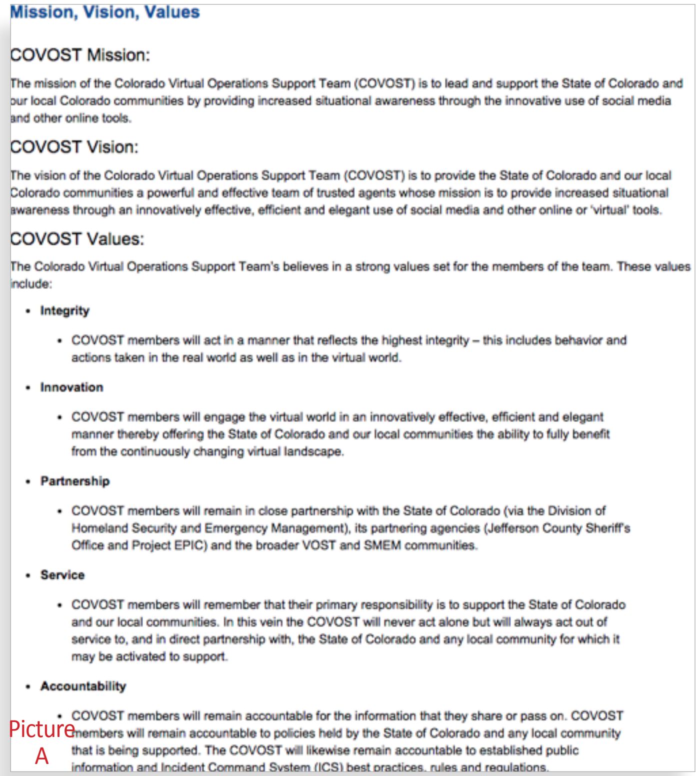
uses for social media

- Community Health
- Crime
- Infrastructure Damage
- Natural Disasters
- Social Unrest
- Terrorism

PHASE ONE *Getting Started*

Establish a Mission, Vision, and Values

According to social media monitoring experts in Colorado, setting the scope and mission of the social media monitoring operations is an important first step. Experts recommend deciding ahead of time the reasons and conditions under which a team will be activated to monitor social media. Click **Picture A** for an example from Colorado.



Mission, Vision, Values

COVOST Mission:

The mission of the Colorado Virtual Operations Support Team (COVOST) is to lead and support the State of Colorado and our local Colorado communities by providing increased situational awareness through the innovative use of social media and other online tools.

COVOST Vision:

The vision of the Colorado Virtual Operations Support Team (COVOST) is to provide the State of Colorado and our local Colorado communities a powerful and effective team of trusted agents whose mission is to provide increased situational awareness through an innovatively effective, efficient and elegant use of social media and other online or 'virtual' tools.

COVOST Values:

The Colorado Virtual Operations Support Team's believes in a strong values set for the members of the team. These values include:

- **Integrity**
  - COVOST members will act in a manner that reflects the highest integrity – this includes behavior and actions taken in the real world as well as in the virtual world.
- **Innovation**
  - COVOST members will engage the virtual world in an innovatively effective, efficient and elegant manner thereby offering the State of Colorado and our local communities the ability to fully benefit from the continuously changing virtual landscape.
- **Partnership**
  - COVOST members will remain in close partnership with the State of Colorado (via the Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Management), its partnering agencies (Jefferson County Sheriff's Office and Project EPIC) and the broader VOST and SMEM communities.
- **Service**
  - COVOST members will remember that their primary responsibility is to support the State of Colorado and our local communities. In this vein the COVOST will never act alone but will always act out of service to, and in direct partnership with, the State of Colorado and any local community for which it may be activated to support.
- **Accountability**
  - COVOST members will remain accountable for the information that they share or pass on. COVOST members will remain accountable to policies held by the State of Colorado and any local community that is being supported. The COVOST will likewise remain accountable to established public information and Incident Command System (ICS) best practices, rules and regulations.

Picture A

Constructing a Team

An important decision to make before monitoring social media is whether the team will be made up of paid staff, volunteers, or a combination of both.

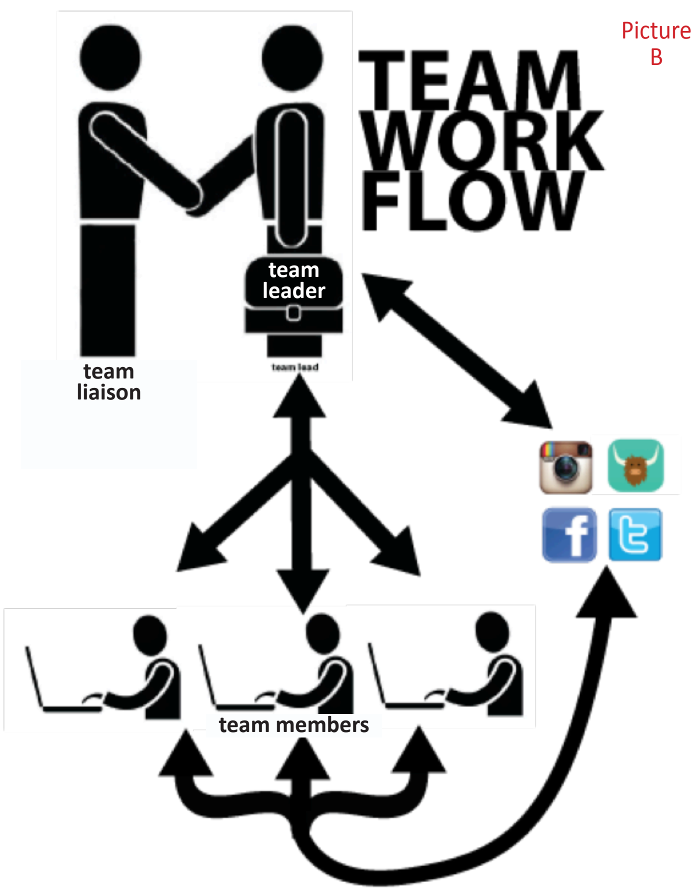
> "You need to decide your VOST model. You can have strictly volunteers or you can have people who are social media savvy already within organizations and have them be virtual team members. Train people in your organization and if they are not activated with a certain emergency, use them. You can also recruit virtual team members from your administrative assistant pool."
>
> - Social Media Expert

Many social media monitoring teams around the country are comprised of both unpaid volunteers and paid staff. When an emergency occurs, resources may become limited within an official emergency management office. Utilizing unpaid volunteers can assist with building additional capacity for monitoring social media during an emergency.

Setting a Structure & Choosing a Leader

The most common social media monitoring structure is outlined in **Picture B**

Picture B



When considering the mission, vision & values, evaluate if monitoring will depend on:

- the type of emergency
- the geographic location of the disaster
- the severity of the disaster
- the quantity of information shared on social media

Setting a Structure con'td..

A Team Leader is chosen to communicate information collected on social media with a Team Liaison (often an Emergency Manager or Public Information Officer from the affected organization) located in the emergency operations center ("EOC"). The Team Leader should be proficient in the social media platforms and have excellent communication skills. A Team Leader can either be a staff member internal to the organization, an Emergency Manager from an external region, or an unpaid volunteer. Team Leaders should be proficient in all social media platforms that are monitored by Team Members. Many interviewees stressed the importance of having multiple Team Leaders to rotate through different shifts in order to ensure that social media efforts are sustained 24 hours per day. Team Members are responsible for monitoring social media and reporting information to the Team Leader.

Create a Handbook

Social media monitoring organizations in Colorado have a formalized handbook that outlines all processes followed by the team. This includes the mission, vision, and values, membership expectations and also clearly outlines the process for activation, deactivation and social media platforms. The handbook created by the Colorado social media monitoring team is published online here.

Having a handbook that clearly outlines social media monitoring procedures assists in developing institutional memory and ensures that new staff are familiar with social media monitoring procedures and expectations.

Unpaid Volunteer Recruitment

Many emergency management organizations do not have the staff necessary to fully monitor social media during an emergency. Utilizing unpaid volunteers is a useful strategy to support digital monitoring activities. Social media monitoring experts recommend establishing the qualifications and membership expectations before recruiting volunteers in order to ensure that volunteers fully understand the time commitment.

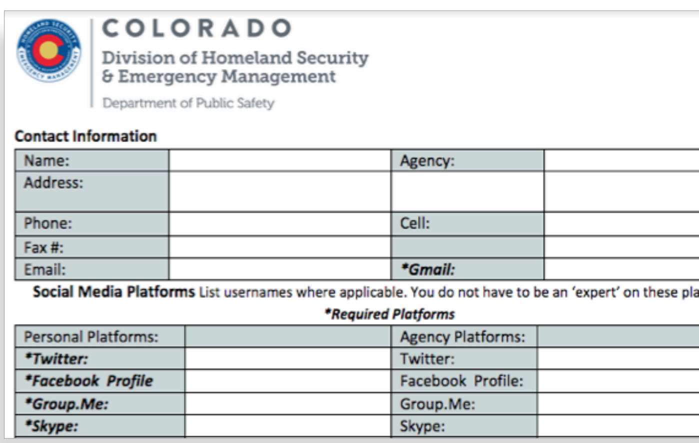
Picture C

To begin recruiting volunteers, the Team Leader can choose to either have an outreach campaign or identify potential volunteers that have an existing relationship with the organization. **Picture C** is an example from a social media monitoring organization in Oregon to recruit volunteers to assist in monitoring during wildfire season.

College students, existing staff, retired staff, external emergency management agencies, and administrative assistants can be major sources for volunteers. International and inter-state volunteers in different time zones can also assist in monitoring social media through the night. Although not required, potential volunteers ideally are already proficient with Facebook, Twitter, Hootsuite, and TweetDeck.

Selecting Volunteers

The Colorado social media monitoring team asks all external volunteers to submit an application and agree to a background check. **Picture D** shows the contact information collected as well as information pertaining to the social media monitoring accounts utilized by the potential volunteers. The volunteer application can be found here. Viewing the potential volunteer's social media accounts can assist in evaluating the social media proficiency of the potential volunteers. Social media monitoring managers in Colorado then import contact information collected on volunteers to a Google Spreadsheet to utilize during an activation.


COLORADO
Division of Homeland Security & Emergency Management
Department of Public Safety

Contact Information

Name:		Agency:	
Address:			
Phone:		Cell:	
Fax #:			
Email:		*Gmail:*	

Social Media Platforms List usernames where applicable. You do not have to be an 'expert' on these platforms.

Required Platforms

Personal Platforms:		Agency Platforms:	
*Twitter:		Twitter:	
*Facebook Profile		Facebook Profile:	
*Group.Me:		Group.Me:	
*Skype:		Skype:	

Picture D

Selecting Volunteers con'td..

After volunteers are selected, clearly communicate the schedule for training sessions. Typically, social media monitoring members are expected to attend one in-person or digital training per month that lasts for 1-2 hours and may include a short homework assignment.

> "Go through a clear recruitment guide. You can use your radio guide. You should also go through a volunteer registration process and background checks." - Social Media Expert

Team Member Characteristics & Skills

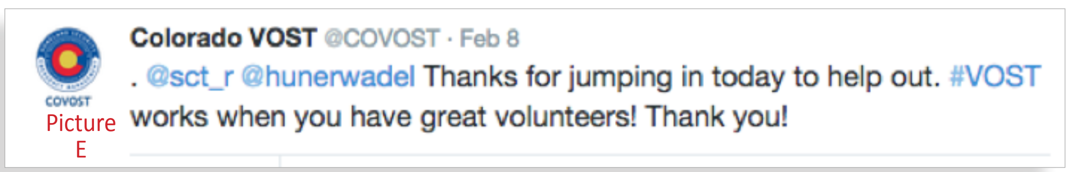
Social media monitoring experts stress the importance of having Team Members that are curious and interested in social media. It is also important for Team Members to be attentive to details, have the ability to multi-task, and can work across social media platforms.

> "Training and exercise is essential. It's also important to have a time and space for team bonding. You can have a Skype overhead room where team members can hang out and have bonding time. Then identify team leadership and do annual required training. Most teams train on Skype or do GoToMeeting."
>
> - Social Media Expert

Several social media monitoring experts suggested to proceed with caution if Team Members appear to be seeking self-promotion or are uncooperative. In the past, some Team Members have been removed from an activation and asked not to return for failing to follow the team-protocol set forth by the Team Leader. Team Members often build a reputation from working on activations, and Team Liaisons and Team Leaders often ask one another for references when accepting new members.

Team Member Retention

A common issue for social media monitoring teams is retaining Team Members that are unpaid volunteers. Many unpaid volunteers will participate in one activation and will not participate in future activations. Social media monitoring experts suggest actively engaging members through continuous communication and building both personal and professional relationships with volunteers. Experts suggest that social media monitoring teams utilize unpaid volunteers even when there is not a regional emergency by offering to assist with other emergencies around the country. In **Picture E**, you will see that the social media monitoring team in Colorado is publically thanking an unpaid volunteer from Oregon. Showing appreciation for your unpaid volunteers can help build relationships and goodwill to participate in the future.

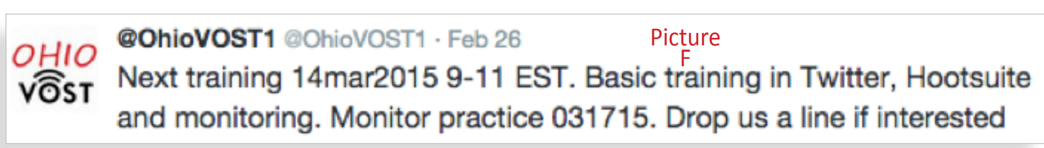


Picture E

Social media monitoring experts also stress the importance of aligning volunteer skills and interests with designated tasks. An expert in California discussed that some volunteers may feel uncomfortable monitoring during times of social unrest. It is important to keep these preferences in mind in order to avoid alienating volunteers and asking them to perform tasks that they are uncomfortable with.

Team Trainings

Team trainings are essential to keep social media monitoring skills sharp, reinforce processes and expectations, and can also serve as a source of team bonding. **Picture F** is an example of the Ohio social media monitoring team advertising their training. Not only do public postings of training assist in communicating with current Team Members, but can also serve to help recruit new unpaid volunteers.



Picture F

> "Training and exercise are essential. Make sure you have time and space for team bonding. Have a Skype overhead room where team members can hang out and do hi-hello bonding time; then identify team leadership and do annual required training- most teams train on skype or do gotomeeting."
>
> - Social Media Expert

Training Simulations

Training simulations can either take place in an open or closed environment. Open simulations can be seen by the public, while closed simulations are created by private consulting firms and are unseen by the public. Training in an open environment can be more risky, while exercising in a closed environment can be more costly. When running an open simulation, it is essential to ensure that the community knows that the activity is a drill. Community members may panic if they do not know that the simulation is only a drill.

Picture G

> **"Before the emergency, it's all about training and exercising. Exercising in open platforms is a great way to prepare. Using the tag #surfquake, we've done some exercises with open platforms like Twitter. Make sure this exercise and training is done in advance. "**
>
> **- Social Media Expert**

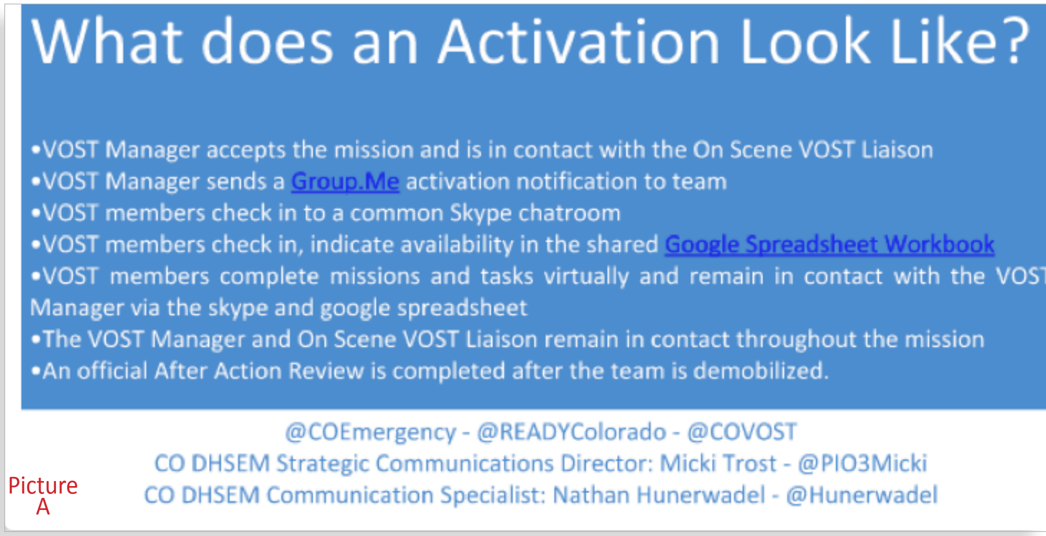
Picture G shows an example of the social media monitoring team informing the public that the information shared on social media is only a drill. The emergency management organization also created a blog to help further explain the details of the simulation to the public. Closed simulations are often cost prohibitive for emergency management organizations, and therefore are rarely used across the country.

Phase Two activation

PHASE TWO *Activation*

Phase two provides steps to activate a social media monitoring team. Before an activation, be sure that the social media monitoring teams know the lead organization's intent and goals for the activation.

Picture A is an outline of the activation process for the Colorado social media monitoring team. This document includes each of the steps for activation and the supporting tools utilized throughout the process.

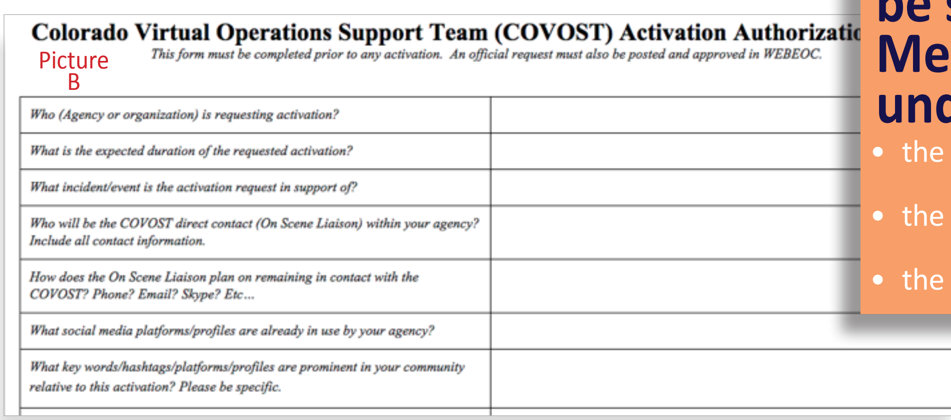


Picture A

The Colorado social media monitoring team also has a formal process for public organizations to request an activation during an emergency through an Activation Authorization Form. This form asks for specific information regarding the emergency in order for the Team Leader to clearly understand the situation. **Picture B** shows a partial example of an Activation Authorization Form. The full form can be downloaded here.

Before activation, be sure Team Members understand:

- the goals of the acitvation
- the deliverables
- the process to complete activities



Colorado Virtual Operations Support Team (COVOST) Activation Authorizati

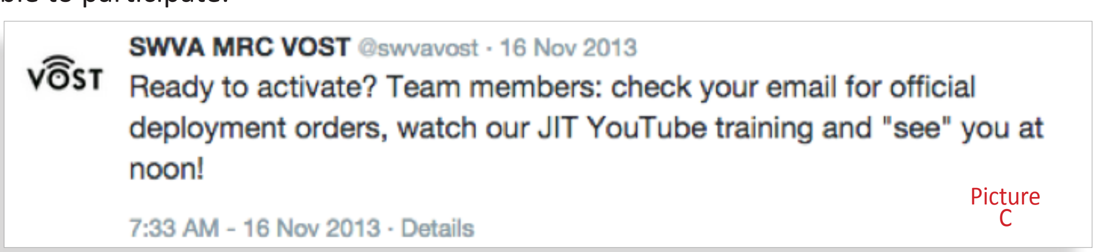
This form must be completed prior to any activation. An official request must also be posted and approved in WEBEOC.

Who (Agency or organization) is requesting activation?	
What is the expected duration of the requested activation?	
What incident/event is the activation request in support of?	
Who will be the COVOST direct contact (On Scene Liaison) within your agency? Include all contact information.	
How does the On Scene Liaison plan on remaining in contact with the COVOST? Phone? Email? Skype? Etc…	
What social media platforms/profiles are already in use by your agency?	
What key words/hashtags/platforms/profiles are prominent in your community relative to this activation? Please be specific.	

Picture B

Call to Assemble the Team

Social media monitoring experts stress the importance of having a clear communication strategy for activating Team Members during an emergency. Commonly used communication methods are: email, telephone, Skype or social media. **Picture C** shows the Southwest Virginia Medical Reserve Corps announcing its activation to Team Members. It is important for Team Members to understand that they should always respond to the call to assemble, even when they are not able to participate.



Picture C

Human Resource Management

Once the team is assembled, the next step is to organize the team's schedule. This can be done in a shared document on Google Drive, similar to **Picture D** from the Pacific Northwest team. In this example, Team Members record the name and their availability for each day. From here, the Team Leader can organize a schedule and identify any potential gaps in the schedule. For an example template, click [here].

Picture D

General Availability Table for VOST Members

Instructions for setup: Change Deployment Start Date in Cell B11 ONLY. Use format MM/DD/YYYY. The remaining dates will adjust automatically. / Set Deployment Time Zone by choosing local time zone of incident in the dropdown (Cells B13:C13).

Instructions for use: Please note availability for one hour blocks. Y = Yes; N = No; M = Maybe. The cells are conditionally formatted to be highlighted. You do not need to do anything but type in the letters. If you have difficulty converting the time to your location, use the dropdown in Cells B15:B16 to automatically show the operational period in your location. If you are across a date line, the date will also convert.

Deployment Start Date	7/29/2012
Deployment Time Zone:	Pacific
Time Zone Conversion:	Eastern

Team Schedule

Name	6/10	6/11	6/12	6/13	6/14	6/15	6/16	6/17	6/18	6/19	6/20	6/21
Team Member												
Team Member												
Team Member												
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When creating the team schedule, Team Members should anticipate working three to four hour shifts. Ideally, the Team Leader should schedule monitoring throughout both the day and night in order to maximize coverage and minimize the possibility of missing new developments.

Assigning Tasks

After developing the monitoring schedule, tasks should be assigned to each Team Member. Activities can be organized in a shared document on Google Drive, to ensure that all Team Members have access to the information. An example of this document from the Pacific Northwest team can be found in **Picture E**. Using the activity log, the Team Leader and Team Members can report the action that needs to be performed, who is responsible for the action, and the day and time the task was completed. This sheet is also a space where Team Members and Team Leaders can notify each other if issues occur during their designated activity. Once an issue is resolved, it can be recorded in the "resolution" column. For an Activity Log template, please click [here].

VOST Activity Log

Sheet Instructions: Team Leader and VOST team members should enter their key activities, along with date/time activity took place

Current Date/Time in Incident Location 42163.6212225694

Date	Time	Who	Action	Issue Flagged for Follow-Up By:	Resolution

Picture E

Monitoring

Upon performing the above tasks, Team Members can begin the monitoring process. There are a number of platforms and tools that Team Members may use to perform these tasks, and these tools may change depending on the demographic groups affected. The most common platforms that teams monitor are Facebook and Twitter; however, other platforms include Instagram, Yik Yak, Snapchat, Reddit , and Youtube (among many other new and emerging tools). According to experts in the field, rural communities are more likely to talk about emergencies on Facebook; meanwhile urban communities are more likely to discuss emergencies on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram. If an emergency affects a younger demographic, they may be more likely to share information using newer platforms like Yik Yak. Due to the anonymity of users on Yik Yak posts are generally much harder to authenticate. If the monitoring team is willing to trust anonymous information, however, it can still serve as a valuable tool.

Because Facebook and Twitter were identified as common places for finding information, we will outline different methods for monitoring each platform below.

Monitoring Facebook

When monitoring Facebook, the first place to search are community pages. Community pages can be run by local news sources, government officials, or community groups. Social media monitoring experts suggest identifying public pages or Facebook groups where the community tends to congregate to discuss an emergency. Community members may also form Facebook groups related to the specific emergency events. To identify new potential resources, perform a thorough search on Facebook for the emergency's name.

Picture F

After identifying key pages, Team Members can begin to search and monitor comments. See **Picture F** for an example of information that a Team Member might find while monitoring Facebook pages that share emergency related information. In the example, an individual has commented on a post made by a local newspaper regarding two missing inmates. In her post she shares that she "heard they were in the woods off rand hill road." Posts such as these should be flagged by the monitoring Team Member and recorded in the Incident Report document discussed in this section.

> **"You want to collect information that is useful to someone. A pattern of information can be detected by individuals or by algorithms. This information can be moved to decision makers by the agreed upon feedback loop."**
>
> **- Social Media Expert**

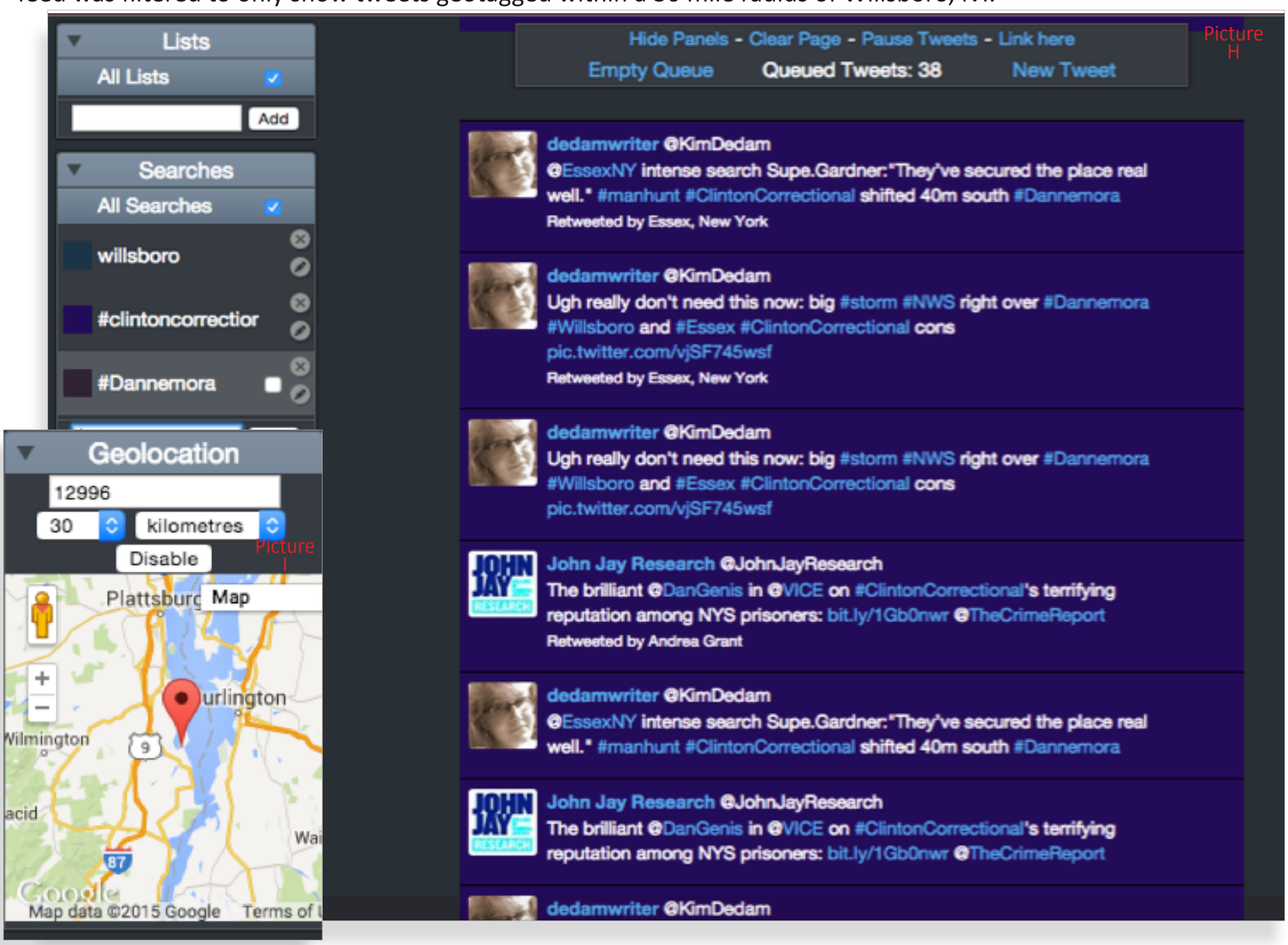
Team Members that are monitoring Facebook should also be aware of any comments or groups that take a "ranting" or "complaining" tone towards emergency responders. While this information may not be helpful in providing additional context about the incident, it can help responders become more aware about the public's sentiment about their actions. This knowledge can also create an opportunity, if necessary, for the Public Information Officer or lead Emergency Manager to publicly respond.

Monitoring Twitter

Monitoring Twitter primarily involves searching the platform for tweets with specific hashtags. If possible, prior to an emergency, use an official account to notify the community of the preferred hashtags that should be used. This way, when an emergency occurs, the team will know key terms to search. See an example tweet from the Colorado team in Picture H. Communities may establish their own hashtags as an event is unfolding. Experts recommend scanning the accounts of local media outlets and community members to view the tags that are commonly used. When monitoring, experts recommend recording the full list of hashtags identified because more than one hashtag may be used to describe an emergency on social media.

Tools such as Twitterfall can help search Twitter for more than one hashtag. Twitterfall is a free web-based tool that links with a user's Twitter account allowing them to search Twitter for multiple words, phrases or hashtags. Tweets that contain any of the words, phrases or hashtags that are being searched are then dropped on a live feed, with the most recent tweets falling at the top. Picture I shows example results generated by TwitterFall. As shown in **Picture H**, a search was completed for the terms "Willsboro", "#ClintonCorrectional" and "Dannemora."

Another helpful feature of Twitterfall is the Geolocation tool. The tool, which utilizes Twitter's geolocation feature, allows users to only see Tweets from a designated geographical area. For the example in **Picture I**, the TwitterFall feed was filtered to only show tweets geotagged within a 30 mile radius of Willsboro, NY.



Sharing Information

While monitoring preferred platforms, all relevant information should be recorded in a shared document, such as Google Docs, to give access to all Team Members and the Team Liaison. The example in **Picture J** shows a template spreadsheet from the VOST Handbook 4.0. In this document, Team Members can report who found the information, the date and time of their finding, a summary of the information, a URL to the information, the action requested for the information, as well as any relevant notes. This document is intended to serve as a "catch all" space, meaning that information in this section has not yet been verified. If submitted information is identified as needing to be vetted, the information can be recorded in the "action requested" section. The "action requested" section can also be utilized to identify if the information is urgent and needs to be escalated to the Emergency Manager. For an example template, click here.

Picture J

Current Date/Time in Incident Location 42164.4988921296

Use incident day/time zone when checking in and out

Please use the following format: hh:mm am or hh:mm pm

Date	Time	Name	Summary	Website URL	Action Requested	Notes

Vetting Information

As stated above, a Team Member may locate information that needs further investigation. Experts recommend developing a list of trusted accounts that Team Members can cross-reference while they are monitoring. This list of accounts can include emergency management organizations, local government officials, law enforcement, or members of the local media. In the event that information is found from an unfamiliar source, experts recommend finding two to three additional sources that are spreading similar information. Another method for investigating the validity of information is to look at the user's profile, their followers, and any previously posted content.

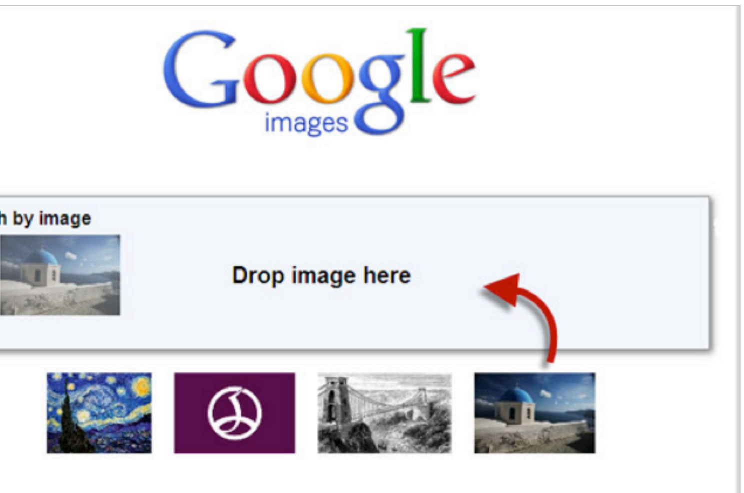
> **"There is a certain amount of instinct to [vetting]. You recognize familiar people and you already have a relationship with them and understand if they are reliable."**
>
> **- Social Media Expert**

> **"We save a list on VOST workbooks about believable accounts, local government, law enforcement, and unofficial accounts."**
>
> **- Social Media Expert**

Using Google Reverse Image Search for Vetting

When seeking to validate an image, one strategy is to perform a reverse image search using tools such as Google Chrome. A Team Member can also check the image properties by left clicking the selected photo and pressing "view properties" to see if the photo data (specifically the date) aligns with the date of the emergency. Both of these tools help evaluate if the image is from the current emergency, was manipulated, or is from an entirely different emergency unrelated to the current event. See **Picture K** for an example.

Picture K



Correcting Misinformation & Amplifying the Official Message

Once a piece of information is reviewed and confirmed to be untrue, monitor social media platforms to ensure that the rumor is not repeated and amplified. If the rumor continues to reoccur, contact the Public Information Officer or Emergency Manager in order to clarify the rumor for the public. Once the rumor is corrected and the public is aware of the truth, the rumor may self-correct, as seen in **Picture L**.

Picture L

In other cases, the rumor may persist. In this event, social media monitors suggest amplifying the official message by using a mix of social media platforms in order to fully maximize the message's reach. Most importantly, make sure to promote the message until the truth outlives the rumor. Make sure these official messages maintain a tone of clarity and professionalism, like in the Colorado team example in **Picture M**. This approach will also help build credibility and trust with the affected community.

> **"We look for a Team Leader who understands the dynamics of social media, complicated searches, and can help amplify official messages. To push information out, we set up Facebook, Twitter and a blog."**
>
> **- Social Media Expert**

Picture M

Deactivate the Social Media Monitoring Team

Colorado experts emphasize the importance of establishing who has the authority to deactivate the social media monitoring team. The Team Leader should work closely with the Emergency Manager or Public Information Officer to determine when the social media monitoring team should be deactivated and return to normal operations. **Picture A** is a deactivation procedure example in Colorado social media monitoring handbook.

Picture A

Deactivation of the COVOST

- The COVOST may be deactivated at any time by the COVOST Liaison.
- The COVOST may be deactivated at any time by the COVOST Manager.
- The COVOST may be deactivated at any time by the DHSEM Strategic Communications Director.
- Prior to deactivation the COVOST Manager will ensure that access to all requested products and services created by the COVOST are provided to the COVOST Liaison.
- COVOST emails, Group.Me messages, Skype conversations and workbooks will be maintained as an official archive of COVOST activities and may be used, at the discretion of the COVOST Manager for training and education purposes.
  - COVOST members may not share items from COVOST emails, Group.Me messages, Skype conversations and workbooks without prior consent from the COVOST Manager.
- The COVOST Manager will lead an after action review of the COVOST activation during one of the monthly trainings immediately preceding the activation.
  - COVOST members are encouraged to record any positive or negative feedback throughout the activation using the "AAR" tab within the COVOST Activation

Before deactivating, the social media monitoring experts recommend collecting important documentation and ensuring that all information has been properly archived. After the deactivation has been authorized, notify all Team Members. During the transition, social media accounts can be used to direct people to active informational sources.

When creating an after action report, considering the following:

- What went well?
- What didn't go well?
- What are some skills that the team can improve upon
- How can things go smoother next time?

Debrief & Reflection

Once the team has deactivated, experts recommend debriefing the team, summarizing actions, and evaluating the overall team performance. Groups in the United States and the United Kingdom also document the summary of action by using formal reporting and archiving methods. They found that having written records can help build institutional memory. At the same time, teams should continue

Debrief & Reflection con'td..

to monitor and capture information on the public's sentiment about how the emergency situation was handled. This approach helps teams reflect on what went well, what didn't go well, and how the team can improve in the future. **Picture D** shows an example of an After Action Report created by the New York Virtual Operations Support Team. To request a full copy of the report, fill out the form here.

> **"Have a team debrief and a summary of action and evaluate how well things went within the group. During recovery, highlight the community activities that are going on to support the emergency recovery, then change your voice and go back to relationship building. "**
>
> **- Social Media Expert**

Ensure That Emotional Needs Are Met

Monitoring social media during an emergency can be a traumatic experience for some staff and volunteers due to the graphic nature of some social media conten Depending on the nature of the emergency, trauma counseling can be done in-person, through a phone hotline, or virtually through a Skype chatroom.

Continue Social Media Efforts

Even when an emergency is not present, the Emergency Management Offices are encouraged to monitor for certain hashtags regularly. The social media monitoring team can use this phase as an opportunity to continue building relationships and gain more credibility. They can also support long-term recovery efforts and amplify the needs of those affected by an emergency or disaster. Many experts suggested that teams should continue to participate in training exercises in order to strive for continuous improvement and adapt to new technologies. For a list of training opportunities, please see the additional resources section.

terminology

activation authorization form	A form used by public organizations seeking to activate a social media monitoring team.
activity log	A table used to collect and manage information collected on social media.
after action report	A report created to outline the social media monitoring aspects that went well, didn't go well, and how processes can improve for the future.
closed-simulation	A social media monitoring training exercise that is operated in a closed environment and unseen by the public.
Facebook	Facebook is a social networking platform where users create profiles and add other users as "friends." Users also have the option to create a Page, which is designated for organizations (instead of single users). Both profile options give users the ability to posts status updates, share photos and videos, and receive notifications when others in their network "like" or comment on this content.
general availability table	A table used to track the availability of social media monitors for scheduling purposes
GeoCode	Geocoding is a process of taking geographic coordinates to create spatial reference through data collection.
Google Drive	A cloud-based storage service run by Google. This system allows users to store, share, and collaborate on documents, spreadsheets, and presentation.
Google Reverse Image Search	This feature allows users to select an image and run a search for other similar photos on the web.
hashtag	A way to label or tag a post by putting a the "#" sign before a certain word or phrase (with no spaces) within the post. Adding a hashtag allows for users to easily locate posts on social media websites that have similar themes or content.
Hootsuite	A social media management system which provides a dashboard to interface with different social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, Google+, and Foursquare.
Instagram	A social networking service that supports online photo sharing through a mobile device.
newsfeed	A web feed that displays up-to-date content from the news streams you are subscribed to. In social media, the news feed is where you can find content posted by other users, typically displayed in chronological order with the most recent updates at the top of the feed.

open-simulation	A social media monitoring training exercise that is operated in an open environment and seen by the public.
“post”	A Facebook post (also known as a “status update”) is a message published on another user’s Facebook page (or “wall”). A post can be a comment, picture, link, or other media form.
re-tweet	The ability on Twitter to share or forward another person’s messages.
“share”	“Sharing” (social media definition) is a feature available on Facebook, where users can re-post another user’s Facebook post on their own timeline. The user who is sharing the post can also add a personalized message to the post.
Skype	Skype is an application that allows users to video and voice chat with other users via computers, tablets or mobile device.
SMEM	Social Media for Emergency Management (SMEM) is a multidisciplinary initiative which explores best practices on how social media is used for emergency management.
social media	Online platforms which allow users exchange information through social networks.
Team Leader	The individual responsible for guiding the social media monitoring team and reporting to the Team Liaison.
Team Liason	The individual responsible for communicating with the Team Leader and gather information to use in the Emergency Operation Center. This individual is often either an Emergency Manager or a Public Information Officer.
Team Member	The individual responsible for monitoring social media and reporting information to the Team Leader.
Twitter	A microblogging social media platform where users can communicate by using up to 140 characters containing words, photos, videos, or links.
Twitterfall	A website which allows Twitter users to follow trends and patterns of tweets. Users can display tweets using certain keywords and hashtags
“tweet”	A message containing no more than 140 characters on Twitter, which can include text, photos, videos, or links.
TweetDeck	A social media dashboard which allows users to manage their Twitter accounts.
VOST	Virtual Operations Support Teams (VOST) are emergency management support groups that leverage technology and social media during a specific emergency, specifically using them to monitor and vet information on social media
Yik-Yak	An anonymous social media network which can be accessed through a mobile device.

best practices
in social media monitoring for Emergency Managers

1. Create clear policies, structures and goals ahead of the actual emergency

Having a formal process may position your social media monitoring team to be more effective. A best practice is to have all processes in writing and published publicly to allow both internal and external Team Members have access to important information. Remember to continually improve, reflect and update your processes regularly.

2. Practice and training help improve important skills

Social media platforms are constantly changing and evolving. While Facebook and Twitter are currently popular platforms, continually participating in training exercises can help ensure that your social media monitoring efforts are adapting to new technologies. Take advantage of free tools, online training materials, and social media monitoring experts.

3. Team composition and skills

Having an effective team composition of both paid staff and volunteers is essential to ensuring that your organization has the capacity and skills to monitor social media during an emergency. It is imperative to fully understand the skillsets of your Team Members and recognize the strengths that they bring to your team. Assigning tasks based on strengths and interests of Team Members will help social media monitoring efforts run more efficiently and effectively.

4. Understand your platforms and community

No two emergencies or communities are alike. The situation and the demographics affected may change the platforms used and the communication strategies your team decides to implement. Prior to an emergency, identify reliable sources of information and try to anticipate where your community may turn for information.

5. Know the parameters and the scope of your mission

Communicate and set expectations with the Team Liaison from the affected organization. You should know ahead of time whether your team will strictly monitor information, or if they will also be utilized to amplify official messages or correct misinformation.

6. Take time to debrief and reflect

The Team should take time after deactivation to reflect on successes, challenges, and potential improvements. Team Leaders should also ensure that the emotional needs of their team are met. Taking a Team Member's mental health into consideration may help retain members.

additional resources

VOST Resources

[Virtual Operations Support Group]

[VOST Basics (Presentation)]

[List of Active VOSTs]

[Colorado Virtual Operations Support Team (Team Website)]

[Colorado Virtual Operations Support Team Handbook]

[Colorado Virtual Operations Support Team Forms]

[Volunteer Registration Form]

[Clark Regional Emergency Services Agency (CRESA) VOST Field Operations Guide]

[VOST Workbook 4.0 (Template)]

Other Resources

[Social Media 4 Emergency Management (Blog)]

[Think Disaster (Blog)]

[National Disaster Preparedness Training Center at the University of Hawaii (Homepage)]

Trainings

[FEMA Independent Study Program (Required Trainings for Unpaid Volunteers in Colorado)]

IS 100 – Introduction to Incident Command Systems
IS 200 – ICS for Single Resources and Initial Action Incidents
IS 700 – National Incident Management System (NIMS)
IS 702 – National Incident Management System (NIMS) Public Information Systems
IS 800 – National Response Framework (NRF) An Introduction
IS 29 – Public Information Officer Awareness
IS 42 – Social Media in Emergency Management

Trainings cont'd

[Colorado VOST Free Virtual Social Media Training]

[VOST Training Guide for New Zealand]

[VOST Training Resources]

Studies

[Virtual Operations Support Group, SMEM and VOST Empirical Studies Resource Sheet]

[Virtual Social Media Working Group and DHS First Responders Group, US Department of Homeland Security (2014), "Using Social Media for Enhanced Situational Awareness and Decision Support"]

[Virtual Social Media Working Group and DHS First Responders Group, US Department of Homeland Security (2013), "Lessons Learned: Social Media and Hurricane Sandy"]

[Virtual Social Media Working Group and DHS First Responders Group, US Department of Homeland Security (2013), "Next Steps: Social Media for Emergency Response"]

[Virtual Social Media Working Group and DHS First Responders Group, US Department of Homeland Security (2013), "Community Engagement and Social Media Best Practices"]

[Virtual Social Media Working Group and DHS First Responders Group, US Department of Homeland Security (2012), "Social Media Strategy"]

Maxwell