



Social Media Toolkit

For Volunteer Fire and
Emergency Service
Departments





Engage Your Community. Reach Your Goals.

Social media is a powerful tool for volunteer fire, EMS, and rescue departments to connect with their communities, share important safety information, raise funds, and recruit new members. This toolkit provides guidance to enhance your social media strategy, engage your community, and achieve your department's outreach goals.

Whether you're starting from scratch or refining your existing presence, the fundamentals presented here will help lay the foundation for success.

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Step-by-Step Social Media Strategy

STEP 1: Establish a Social Media Policy

Before posting, it is critical to create a social media policy for your department. This policy ensures consistency, protects privacy, and prevents any violations of laws like HIPAA. Everyone who has access to post on your department's social media accounts must understand and follow the policy.

The policy should address the following key areas:

● Appropriate Content

Clearly define what type of content is acceptable and what isn't. Do not endorse political candidates or take sides on partisan issues from department accounts. Focus on community, service, and public education.

● Privacy Considerations

Ensure that personal health information, patient details, and incident scene photos do not violate HIPAA. Avoid posting photos of incident scenes that include victims or license plates. Be mindful of sharing photos or information from a sensitive scene.

● Engagement and Responses

Establish guidelines for how to respond to comments, including positive and negative feedback, and how to engage with the community.

● Account Security

Define best practices for securing accounts, including the use of strong passwords, enabling two-factor authentication, and removing old users from admin roles.

● Handling Misinformation

Outline how misinformation or harmful content should be handled and corrected. Always respond professionally, not emotionally. For misinformation, correct it with facts and a respectful tone. Hide or delete inappropriate comments if necessary — especially anything that violates your department or community standards.

[» See examples of social media policies](#)

STEP 2: Designate Platform Managers

Assign one or two trusted individuals to manage and post content. Having designated platform managers ensures consistent messaging and avoids confusion. This also helps maintain a centralized point of control for your department's social media presence. Make sure that those managing accounts are:

- Trained on the social media policy.
- Equipped with the knowledge of what to post and how to handle sensitive situations.
- Responsible for regularly checking and engaging with followers.

STEP 3: Choose Your Platforms

Choosing the right platform for your department is key. Don't feel pressure to be everywhere. Focus on where your community is most active and where you can consistently post.

Here's a breakdown of popular platforms:



Facebook

This platform is essential for most departments as it's ideal for building community relationships, sharing event information, photos, and updates. It's widely used by adults over 30, a key audience for volunteer recruitment and public safety education.

Features: Events, Groups, Live Video, Photo Albums



Instagram

A visually-driven platform, Instagram is perfect for sharing photos and short-form videos that highlight your department in action. It's also great for reaching younger demographics.

Features: Stories, Reels, Hashtags, Carousels



X (formerly Twitter)

Ideal for real-time updates and breaking news, X can supplement your other platforms but is not necessary for every department.

Features: Short-form Posts, Threads, Retweets



LinkedIn

Useful for professional networking and showcasing your department's achievements, partnerships, and leadership.

Features: Articles, Event Updates, Member Highlights



TikTok

This is a growing platform for reaching younger audiences. If allowed, it's great for creative, short-form videos.

Features: Viral Trends, Audio Overlays, Storytelling



Nextdoor

Tap into a built-in audience of verified community members to engage, alert, inform, recruit, and raise funds.

Features: Nextdoor for Public Agencies available for free to fire and emergency service departments, library of NFPA-approved public safety messages and graphics

» [Learn more about Nextdoor for Public Agencies in this webinar.](#)



Focus on where your community is most active and where you can consistently post.

STEP 4: Set Up Your Department Accounts

Once you've chosen your platforms, it's essential to set up complete and consistent profiles. Also, note that some platforms have a different process for setting up an organization/business account versus a personal account.

- **Naming Conventions:** Keep your page names clear and consistent across all platforms (e.g., "Springfield Volunteer Fire Dept").
- **Bios/About Section:** Clearly state your mission, where you're located, and include a call to action, like "Join us" or "Volunteer today."
- **Contact Info:** Ensure that contact info is included, such as an email, phone number, or a link to your recruitment or contact page.
- **Linktree or Website Link:** Use tools like Linktree or your department's website to create a central hub for resources, especially on platforms like Instagram that allow for only one clickable link. Linktree is a link-in-bio platform that lets users consolidate multiple URLs into a single, customizable landing page.

STEP 5: Plan and Create Your Content

Develop a content plan that mixes various post types to engage your audience and reflect the full scope of your department's work. Below are some key themes to include.

● Recruitment Posts

- Promote volunteer opportunities.
- Share testimonials from current volunteers about why they joined.
- Highlight the benefits of volunteering, like camaraderie and serving the community.

● Volunteer Spotlights

- Feature individual members, highlighting their years of service, role in the department, or unique stories.
- Post about your members' achievements and milestones both in and out of the firehouse, such as a certification earned, a graduation, a promotion, a new baby, etc.

● Fire Safety Tips

Post reminders about smoke alarms, fire safety, and seasonal tips (e.g., grilling safety, holiday lights).

● Community Events

Promote upcoming events like open houses, fundraisers, school visits, or public demonstrations.

● Behind-the-Scenes

Show training exercises, equipment checks, and pre-call routines to give people a sense of the work your team does.

● National Campaigns

Participate in existing campaigns like [Make Me A Firefighter](#), [Fire Prevention Week](#), [EMS Week](#), [Crash Responder Safety Week \(CRSW\)](#), and [Safety Stand Down](#).

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Tips and Tools to Help Implement a Social Media Plan

Tools for Scheduling and Tracking Posts

Scheduling and monitoring your posts across multiple platforms can be done efficiently using specialized tools. These tools allow you to pre-schedule content, track performance, and analyze engagement all in one place.

- **Meta Business Suite:** A free tool for Facebook and Instagram. You can schedule posts, respond to messages, and access basic analytics, all from one dashboard.
- **Buffer, Hootsuite, Later, Zoho Social:** These are just some of the online social media management tools that exist to enable you to plan content across multiple platforms. You can schedule posts, view a content calendar, and analyze performance. Buffer, Later, and Zoho Social offer free plans, while Hootsuite is generally a paid service, though all of these tools provide tracking and scheduling features.
- **Canva's Content Planner:** If you already use [Canva](#) to design graphics, the Canva Content Planner is a useful tool for scheduling posts directly from the design tool. It's great for organizing and planning posts in advance. Eligible nonprofits can get a Canva Pro account at no charge through [Canva for Nonprofits](#).



Look for affordable or free alternatives if cost is a concern. Buffer's free plan or other budget-friendly options like Later can help you get the job done without breaking the bank. By using these tools, you'll be able to plan your content ahead of time, track your success across platforms, and stay on top of community engagement more efficiently.

Post Consistently and Time It Right

It's more important to be consistent than to post constantly. Here's a general guideline for how often and best times to post.

How often to post:

- Facebook/Instagram: 2-4 times per week
- X: 3-5 times per week
- LinkedIn: 1-2 times per week
- TikTok: 1-2 times per week
- Nextdoor: 2-3 times per week

Best times to post:

- Weekdays between 8-10 am and 5-7 pm for higher engagement.
- Sundays tend to perform well for community-focused posts.

Use Engaging Visuals

Strong visuals help your department stand out and tell your story more effectively. Photos, videos, and simple graphics can showcase your work, promote events, and share important safety messages. Here's how to make the most of each:



Photos

- Use natural light whenever possible.
- Avoid cluttered backgrounds and ensure the focus is on the people or actions in the shot.
- Always ask for permission before sharing photos of individuals (especially minors).



Videos

- Keep videos short (30–60 seconds) and direct.
- Use captions, as many users watch videos without sound.
- Film in vertical format for platforms like Instagram Stories or TikTok.
- Include your department's name/logo for branding.
- Find more tips in this video [How to Shoot Quality Firehouse Videos With Your Cell Phone](#) or this [one-pager](#).



Graphics

- Use simple graphics to promote events, highlight recruitment needs, share safety tips, or announce department updates.
- Stick to consistent colors, fonts, and logos to build recognition.
- Tools like [Canva](#), [Adobe Express](#), or even platform built tools on Facebook and Instagram make it easy to create professional looking graphics with no design experience.



Don't worry about being perfect — authenticity performs better than overly polished content!

Here's a short list of beginner-friendly, mostly free video editing tools for social media:

- ▶ [iMovie](#) (Mac/iOS) – Easy to use with basic editing features like trimming, transitions, and titles.
- ▶ [DaVinci Resolve](#) (Windows/Mac/Linux) – Free version available with advanced features for beginners to explore.
- ▶ [Shotcut](#) (Windows/Mac/Linux) – Open-source, free tool with a simple interface for basic editing.
- ▶ [InShot](#) (iOS/Android) – Mobile app for quick edits with features like trimming, text, and music overlay.
- ▶ [CapCut](#) (iOS/Android) – Free and beginner-friendly mobile editor with lots of effects, music, and templates.
- ▶ [Adobe Express](#) (Web/iOS/Android) – Free with limited features; great for simple, quick edits and templates.
- ▶ [Canva](#) (Web/iOS/Android) – Free, beginner-friendly tool for creating and editing videos, social graphics, and animations. Easily add text, music, transitions, and resize content for different platforms all in one place.

Stay Engaged and Forward Thinking

Monitoring comments and messages is crucial to maintaining trust and credibility in your community. Engagement does not require long or overly conversational responses. Simple, professional acknowledgment is often enough. Make sure to:

- **Respond professionally to both positive and negative comments.** Keep responses brief, respectful, and factual. You do not need to engage in debates or match the tone of the commenter.
- **Delete or hide comments that violate your department's social media policy,** including profanity, harassment, hate speech, misinformation, or personal attacks. Document the comment before removal if needed.

Examples of Appropriate Responses to Negative Comments

When appropriate, acknowledge concerns without becoming defensive.

- *"We understand your concern and appreciate you sharing your feedback."*
- *"Thank you for bringing this to our attention. Please contact the department directly so we can follow up."*

If a comment is inaccurate but not hostile:

- *"To clarify, our department responded at [time/date] and followed established procedures."*

If a comment is hostile, inflammatory, or violates policy:

- Do not engage publicly.
- Remove the comment according to policy and document it internally if necessary.
- If a user continues to violate policy, block or restrict the account to prevent further disruption.

Best Practices to Remember

- ✓ You are not required to respond to every comment.
- ✓ Never argue or escalate a situation on social media.
- ✓ When in doubt, move the conversation offline.
- ✓ Consistency and professionalism matter more than personality.

This approach helps departments stay responsive and transparent without putting pressure on staff to be overly social or informal online.

What to Do if a Post Doesn't Perform

- **Don't panic** — not every post will go viral.
- **Try posting at a different time** or day.
- **Reword your post** with a stronger hook or question.
- **Use a more engaging visual** — people tend to scroll past graphics that feel generic.
- **Boost the post** with a small budget if it includes a key message (like recruitment).

Writing Captions

The right caption can bring your visuals to life and promote engagement:

- **Start with a hook or question** to engage your audience immediately.
- **Add a call to action:** “Join us,” “Learn more,” or “Tag a friend.”



Example:

“Meet Alex, one of our newest volunteers! 🧡 When he’s not training, he’s helping kids learn fire safety. Want to join him? Learn more: [\[Enter link\]](#) #MakeMeAFirefighter”

Using Hashtags and Tagging

Hashtags help organize content on social media and make your posts easier for people to discover. When you add a hashtag, your post can appear in searches or feeds for users who follow or browse that topic. Used correctly, hashtags can expand your reach beyond your current followers and help connect your department with your local community and the broader fire service.

Keep hashtags limited and relevant. Use NO MORE than **3-4 relevant hashtags** per post. Using too many can make posts harder to read and does not improve performance. Focus on local, campaign-specific, and general fire service hashtags:

#VolunteerFirefighter

#FireSafety


#MakeMeAFirefighter

#[YourTown]FireDept

@ Tag relevant partners. Tagging relevant partners, sponsors, or community organizations helps increase visibility and encourages resharing, allowing your message to reach a wider audience. To tag an account, simply add the “@” symbol before the partner’s handle.

Leverage AI for Content Generation

Artificial intelligence (AI) can be a powerful asset for creating engaging and consistent social media content. Utilizing AI tools can help your department streamline content creation, reduce workload, and enhance creativity. By analyzing current trends, popular hashtags, and effective messaging, AI tools can help craft posts that align with the latest digital trends, ensuring your posts stay relevant. However, AI is not perfect — always verify accuracy and edit for readability as needed.

 **WARNING:** Anything you input into OpenAI or other AI tools is no longer private. Do not enter any sensitive, personal, or confidential information, including private addresses, phone numbers, or medical data, into these platforms. Always prioritize privacy and security when using AI tools.

AI tools can:

- **Generate social media post content** based on specific themes like fire safety, recruitment, or department milestones.
- **Optimize for hashtags:** AI can suggest trending or location-specific hashtags to increase post visibility and engagement.
- **Provide engaging prompts:** If you're running low on ideas, AI can propose questions or interactive prompts to encourage audience participation.
- **Graphic and Video Content Creation:** AI tools can also assist in creating visuals. Platforms like Canva have integrated AI features that allow you to design graphics quickly, with customizable templates, text suggestions, and AI-driven color and layout recommendations.

Top AI Tools for Content Generation:

- [ChatGPT](#) – Great for generating captions, post ideas, and longer-form content
- [Claude](#) – Strong for thoughtful writing, editing, and summarizing longer content
- [Canva](#) – Offers AI-powered tools for creating social graphics, presentations, and short videos
- [Adobe Express](#) – Includes AI features for quick content creation, templates, and resizing
- [Copy.ai](#) – Helps generate social posts, ad copy, and campaign ideas
- [Jasper](#) – Designed for marketing teams creating high-quality written content
- [CapCut](#) – Includes AI-assisted video editing, captions, and templates for social media
- [InShot](#) – Easy-to-use app for quick video edits with music, text, and trimming features



AI is meant to be used as a tool that benefits efficiency, creativity, and scalability. Always make sure to personalize and refine AI-generated content to match your department's voice and values. AI tools provide a starting point, but the best content will always reflect your unique tone and community focus.

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Tracking Analytics and Growth

Understanding your social media performance helps you fine-tune your strategy and reach more of the right people. Regularly reviewing your analytics (sometimes called 'insights') helps you understand what is working and what needs improvement.

Key Metrics to Track



Reach: The number of people who saw your post. This helps you understand how far your content has spread.



Impressions: The number of times your post was displayed. This can include multiple views from the same person.



Likes/Reactions: A basic measure of interest where users show approval by engaging with your post.



Comments: Indicates strong engagement, providing a chance to interact with your audience and build relationships.



Shares: Signals that your content is compelling enough for someone to send it to others, extending its reach.





Clicks: Shows interest in learning more or taking action, such as clicking on a recruitment link.





Engagement rate (total engagements such as likes, comments, shares, and clicks divided by reach) is a key indicator of how well your content resonates with your audience. High engagement rates often mean that your posts are hitting the mark with your community.


Where to Find Insights

 **Facebook and Instagram:** Open Meta Business Suite from your Facebook page. From here, you can see detailed metrics on post performance, audience demographics, and engagement rates.

 **X (Twitter):** Analytics can be found by clicking on the “More” dropdown menu in your profile and selecting Analytics.

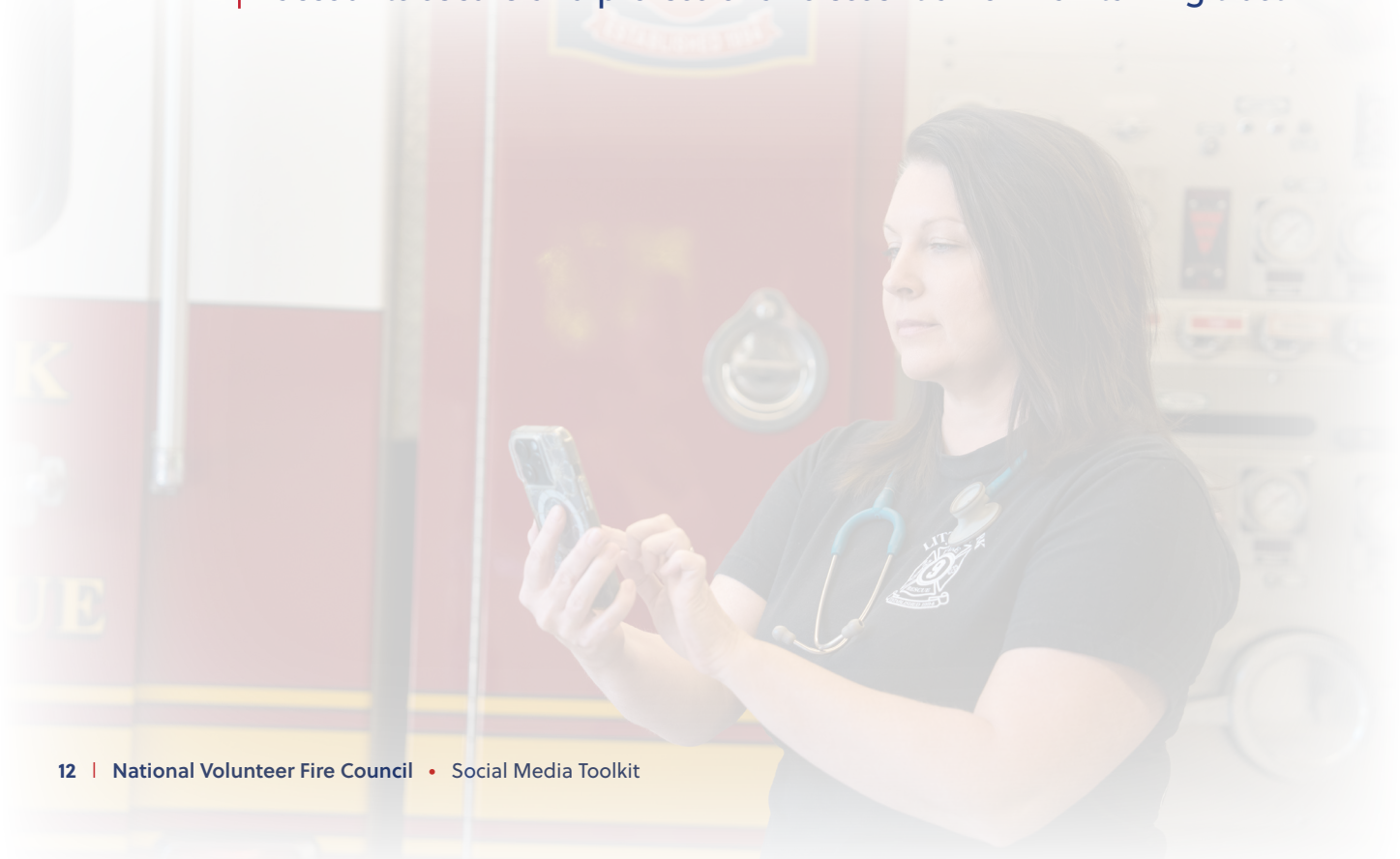
 **LinkedIn:** Visit the Analytics section of your company page to track performance, including post reach, engagement, and follower demographics.

 **TikTok:** Access TikTok Analytics via your account settings under Creator Tools to see performance data on your videos, including views, engagement, and audience demographics.

 **Nextdoor:** Insights are available through your department’s Nextdoor Page Admin dashboard. From there, you can review basic performance metrics such as post views, reactions, comments, and follower growth. While analytics are more limited than other platforms, these insights help you understand which community updates and safety messages resonate most with neighbors.



Pay attention to which posts drive the most clicks, shares, or saves, not just likes. This helps you understand what content your audience finds most valuable and worth taking action on. Keeping your accounts secure and professional is essential for maintaining trust.



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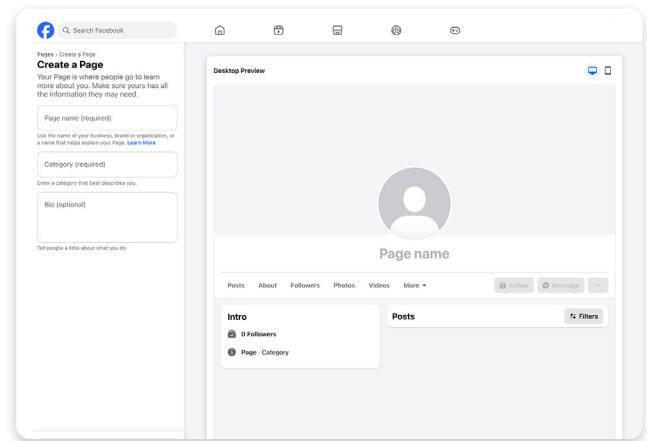
Facebook Ads

Facebook ads are a powerful and cost-effective way for volunteer fire and emergency service departments to reach their local communities, raise awareness, and recruit new volunteers. Even with a small budget, targeted ads can help you connect with the right audience — whether you're looking for new recruits, promoting an event, or sharing a public safety message.

Set Up Your Facebook Page

Before you can run ads, your department needs a Facebook Page (not just a personal profile). Here's how to set one up:

1. **Log into Facebook** with a personal account that will manage the Page.
2. **Go to:** facebook.com/pages/create
3. **Choose "Business or Brand"**
4. **Name your Page** (e.g., "Springfield Volunteer Fire Department")
5. **Add details:**
 - Category: "Fire Station" or "Fire Protection Service"
 - Location, contact info, and website
 - Profile image (use your department logo)
 - Cover photo (action shot or team photo works great)
6. **Complete your About section** with a mission statement and call to action (like "Join our team!")



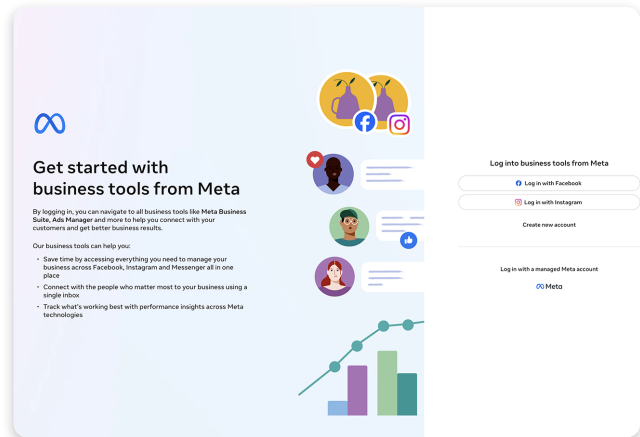
Make sure at least two trusted team members have admin access to the page using the Meta Business Suite. This will ensure that you don't lose access to your page if an admin loses access to their personal Facebook account.

Set Up a Facebook Ad Account

To run ads, you need to set up Meta Business tools:

1. Visit business.facebook.com and create a Business Manager account.
2. Once created, **connect your Page** to the Business Manager.
3. Navigate to **"Business Settings" > "Ad Accounts."**
4. Click **"Add" > "Create a New Ad Account."**
 - o Name it (e.g., "Springfield VFD Ads").
 - o Set your local time zone and currency.
 - o Assign your Page and yourself (and any other admins) as users with full access.
5. **Add a Payment Method** under "Payment Settings."

Note: You'll need a debit or credit card to fund your ad campaigns.



How to Place Your First Ad

You can place ads directly through your department's Facebook Page or using Ads Manager.

Option A: Boost a Post (Quick and Simple)

1. Go to your Page and choose a recent recruitment or community event post.
2. Click "Boost Post."
3. Choose a goal — for example, "Get more people to message you" or "Get more engagement."
4. Select your audience:
 - o Use the "People in your local area" option.
 - o Narrow by age (e.g., 18–55) and interests like "EMS," "volunteering," or "firefighter."
 - o Certain terms, especially related to recruiting or job opportunities, may cause Facebook to flag your post as "employment-related," which could limit your ability to narrow the target audience.
5. Set your budget (even \$25 can go a long way).
6. Choose duration (3–7 days is a great starting point).
7. Click "Boost" to publish your ad.

Option B: Ads Manager (More Control and Customization)

1. Go to adsmanager.facebook.com.
2. Click "Create" and select your objective:
 - Traffic (send people to a specific webpage)
 - Awareness (general outreach to your target audience)
 - Engagement (get more likes/comments/shares on posts)
3. You'll need to create a campaign, an ad set, and an ad. The campaign controls the objective; the ad set controls the duration of the campaign and the spend. The ad is where you insert your creative and text copy. You can create multiple ads within one ad set and multiple ad sets within one campaign.
4. Set your budget and timeframe.
5. Review all settings carefully. Before publishing, take a close look at Facebook's ad options:
Choose between a **daily budget** (spending a set amount per day) or a **lifetime budget** (total amount over the full campaign).
6. Be mindful of automated tools like **Advantage+ creative** and **Advantage+ audience**. While these options may optimize performance, they can also limit your control over how your ad looks or who sees it. These options will add links you may not want and add music you may not like. Consider turning them off if you want more manual oversight.
7. Add your Creative Content into your ad: Upload an image or video that clearly represents your department or select an existing post to turn into an ad. Strong visuals featuring your own members tend to perform better than stock images.
8. Always double-check each section before launching to make sure your ad is targeting the right audience with the right message.
9. Review and publish your ad!



Test a few different images or captions and see which ad performs best.

Best Practices for Fire Department Facebook Ads

- ✓ Use real photos of your members in action — not stock images.
- ✓ Include a clear call to action like "Apply now" or "Join our team."
- ✓ Keep your message short, local, and personal.
- ✓ Respond quickly to comments and messages that come through the ad.
- ✓ Track results in Meta's Ad Manager dashboard.

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Additional Resources

- [Make Me A Firefighter](#): Provides customizable and ready-to-use posts/graphics and videos for your department and opportunity listing page.
- [Linktree](#): Helps manage multiple links from one bio (especially useful on Instagram).
- [Canva for Nonprofits](#): Provides free access to the premium features of Canva Pro for eligible nonprofits (Canva also has a free basic plan available to all). Canva is a user-friendly online design platform for creating visual content and graphics.
- [NFPA](#): Access educational content for public safety. Check out the [Fire Prevention Week Toolkit](#).
- [Learn How to Utilize Nextdoor to Engage Your Community](#)
- Roundtable Talk - [The Use of Social Media as a Volunteer Recruitment and Retention Tool](#)
- Roundtable Talk - [Strengthening Volunteer Recruitment & Retention Through Effective Social Media](#)
- Webinar - [Social Media in the Fire Service: Benefits and Considerations](#)
- Webinar - [Reaching Through the Screen with Social Media](#)
- Webinar - [Smarter, Not Harder: Using AI to Support Volunteer Responder Recruitment & Retention](#)
- Additional video resources are available on the [NVFC YouTube channel](#).

Need help or have questions?

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