

Are Foundation Leaders Using Social Media?

All it takes is a quick visit to Glasspockets.org to see just how fast and how far foundations have come in terms of using social media. As of August 2010, the web site had documented the Web 2.0 activities of more than 650 foundations, including 271 that are active on [Facebook](http://Facebook.com), 190 on [Twitter](http://Twitter.com), 102 with blogs, and 93 on [YouTube](http://YouTube.com).

While such statistics provide clear evidence that foundations are actively using social media, just how engaged are the leaders of foundations themselves with these new communications tools? In July 2010, the Foundation Center surveyed members of its Grantmaker Leadership Panel in order to find out. Completed surveys were received from 73 of 228 current Panel members, for a response rate of 32 percent. (See sidebar for more details on the Panel.)

Grantmaker Leadership Panel

The Foundation Center's Grantmaker Leadership Panel draws upon the expertise of chief executives at leading U.S. private and public foundations on critical issues of interest to the sector. The Panel serves to facilitate the rapid exchange of information among foundation leaders and with the broader sector to further important conversations in the field. Currently 228 foundation leaders participate, providing a regionally representative sample of the largest 400 independent and 200 community foundations in the country. Panel members hold assets totaling over \$100 billion and make grants totaling more than \$7 billion annually.

Testing the Waters

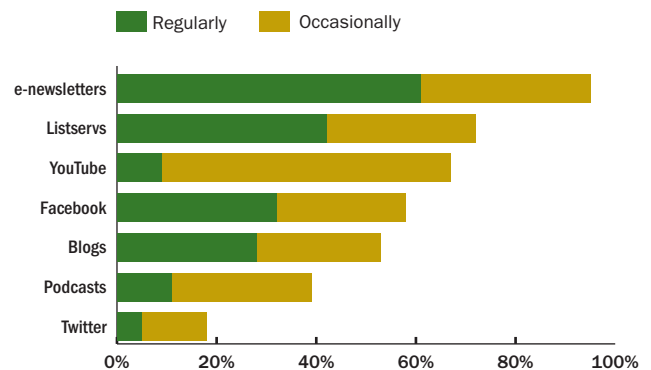
Usage¹ of social media by foundation leaders is catching on, but it's not yet part of the regular routines of most chief executives. Aside from relatively "old-fashioned" online communications tools such as e-newsletters and Listservs, fewer than one-third of foundation chief executives are using Web 2.0 services such as blogs, Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, and Podcasts on a regular basis.

- ◆ About one-third (33 percent) of foundation leaders use Facebook regularly, and a similar number (30 percent) regularly read blogs.
- ◆ About one in 10 foundation chief executives uses Podcasts (11 percent) or YouTube (10 percent) on a regular basis.
- ◆ Just 6 percent use Twitter regularly.
- ◆ Nearly two-thirds (65 percent) use e-newsletters regularly, while about half (47 percent) use Listservs regularly.

But while regular users of social media are still very much in the minority among foundation chief executives, more than half are using YouTube (68 percent), Facebook (59 percent), and blogs (53 percent) at least occasionally. Podcasts have been slower to catch on with foundation leaders (39 percent use them at least occasionally).

¹"Usage," refers to all levels of social media use, ranging from passive consumption to active participation.

Use of Social Media/Web 2.0 Services by Foundation Leaders



Source: The Foundation Center, September 2010. Figures based on the responses of 73 members of the Foundation Center's Grantmaker Leadership Panel.

Twitter is largely unexplored territory—just 18 percent of foundation leaders said they use Twitter at least occasionally. More than half (60 percent) have never used it.

Of course, "using" social media is not the same as actively contributing to social media sites. Not surprisingly, only a few foundation leaders (16 percent) have ever "tweeted" (posted messages to Twitter). But a sizable minority (44 percent) have personally contributed or responded to a blog post.

Reading Blogs

Blogs have proliferated in every field, and philanthropy is no exception. We asked foundation leaders to tell us which blogs they had read or looked at in the past six months.

Of the 13 blogs mentioned in the survey, about one-third of the respondents (33 percent) said they had not looked at any in the past six months. Another third (32 percent) had looked at one or two, and 35 percent had looked at three or more.

The *Huffington Post* emerged as the leading blog among the foundation chief executives surveyed. More than half (53 percent) said they had looked at the *Huffington Post* at least once in the past six months. No other blog had been read by as many as one-third of foundation leaders during that period.

A group of five other blogs each reached about 20 to 30 percent of foundation leaders during the past six months. These included the Center for Effective Philanthropy blog, *Philanthropy 2173*, *Give and Take*, *PhilanTopic*, and *Tactical Philanthropy*.

When asked to name the blog they read most often, foundation leaders mentioned the *Huffington Post* (named by 15 of the 73 respondents), followed by *Philanthropy 2173*, *PhilanTopic*, and *Tactical Philanthropy* (each named by 4 respondents).

How Useful Are Social Media in Furthering the Work of Foundations?

Foundation leaders appear to be cautiously optimistic about the potential of social networking/Web 2.0 services to help further the work of philanthropy in general, but are uncertain how best to use them to further the work of their own foundations.

Nearly three-quarters (73 percent) think that social networking/Web 2.0 services have been at least somewhat

Blogs Read by Foundation Leaders at Least Once in the Past Six Months

	Number of Respondents	Percent of Respondents
Huffington Post	39	53%
Center for Effective Philanthropy Blog	22	30%
Philanthropy 2173 (Lucy Bernholz)	18	25%
Give and Take (Chronicle of Philanthropy)	17	23%
PhilanTopic (Foundation Center)	17	23%
Tactical Philanthropy	14	19%
GiveWell Blog	10	14%
Beth's Blog	8	11%
A. Fine Blog	4	5%
Case Foundation Blog	4	5%
Intrepid Philanthropist (Center for Strategic Philanthropy and Civil Society at Duke)	4	5%
White Courtesy Telephone (postcards.typepad.com)	2	3%
SocialEntrepreneurship.change.org (Nathaniel Whittemore)	1	1%
Other	9	12%

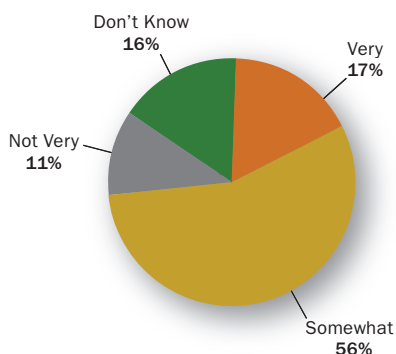
Source: The Foundation Center, September 2010. Figures based on the responses of 73 members of the Foundation Center's Grantmaker Leadership Panel.

useful in furthering philanthropic work in general. Just 11 percent feel that they have not been very useful, while 16 percent "don't know." (No one said that social networking/Web 2.0 services have "not been useful at all.")

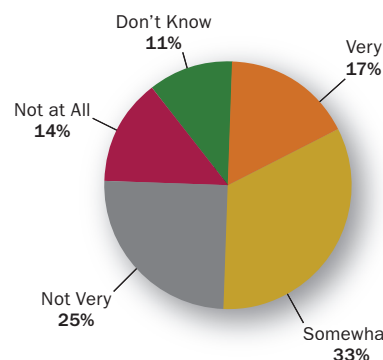
Foundation leaders are divided as to whether social networking/Web 2.0 services have been useful in furthering the work of their own foundations. Half (50 percent) think that they have been at least somewhat useful, but 39 percent say they have been either "not very useful" (25 percent) or "not useful at all" (14 percent). Eleven percent "don't know."

Thomas Wilcox, president of the Baltimore Community Foundation, is among those who say that social networking/Web 2.0 services have been "very useful" in furthering the work of his foundation, noting that the foundation's presence on Twitter and Facebook "has brought us new donors and philanthropic partners." Other foundations that have found Web 2.0 services to be "very useful" include: Battle Creek Community Foundation, Community Foundation Serving Richmond & Central Virginia, Greater New Orleans Foundation, Rasmuson Foundation, and Triangle Community Foundation.

Perceived Usefulness of Social Media/Web 2.0 Services



Usefulness of social networking/Web 2.0 services in furthering philanthropic work in general



Usefulness of social networking/Web 2.0 services in furthering the work of my foundation

Source: The Foundation Center, September 2010. Figures based on the responses of 73 members of the Foundation Center's Grantmaker Leadership Panel.

But for many chief executives, realizing the full potential of social media still lies ahead. Said one private foundation president: “I think that our foundation will need to use more social networking/Web 2.0 services in the future. We are now crafting a social media policy.” A community foundation president may have spoken for many when she said, “I am personally inept and disconnected, but I see its value.”

Finally, Karen McNeil-Miller, president of the Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust, notes that “the end has yet to be written on the social networking chapter in philanthropy. I imagine a generation of foundation leadership (myself included, even as one of the relatively younger CEOs) will have to go away before it is embraced and tested fully.”

Social Media “Power Users”

While most foundation chief executives still view social media as a frontier yet to be explored, six of the 73 leaders surveyed are personally both blogging and tweeting on topics related to philanthropy—four at community foundations and two at private foundations. Two of the six are also either regular or occasional users of at least six forms of Web 2.0 services (e.g., blogs, [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), [YouTube](#), etc.) and have visited nine or more philanthropy-oriented blogs at least once in the past six months. Among foundation leaders, these are the social media “power users.”



SOCIAL MEDIA PROFILE
Emily Kessler, Executive Director
Joukowsky Family Foundation

Use of social networking/Web 2.0 services:

Blogs	REGULARLY
e-newsletters	REGULARLY
Facebook	REGULARLY
Listservs	NEVER
Podcasts	REGULARLY
Twitter	REGULARLY
YouTube	OCCASIONALLY

Personally blogs on topics related to philanthropy—YES

Personally tweets on topics related to philanthropy—YES

Favorite blog—*Tactical Philanthropy*

Also reads—*A. Fine Blog, Beth’s Blog, Case Foundation blog, Center for Effective Philanthropy blog, Give and Take, GiveWell blog, Huffington Post, Philanthropy 2173, SocialEntrepreneurship.change.org, PhilanTopic*



SOCIAL MEDIA PROFILE
Albert Ruesga, President
Greater New Orleans Foundation

Use of social networking/Web 2.0 services:

Blogs	REGULARLY
e-newsletters	REGULARLY
Facebook	REGULARLY
Listservs	REGULARLY
Podcasts	OCCASIONALLY
Twitter	REGULARLY
YouTube	REGULARLY

Personally blogs on topics related to philanthropy—YES

Personally tweets on topics related to philanthropy—YES

Favorite blog—*GiftHub*

Also reads—*Beth’s Blog, Center for Effective Philanthropy blog, Give and Take, GiveWell blog, Huffington Post, PhilanTopic, Tactical Philanthropy, White Courtesy Telephone*

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The Foundation Center's Research Institute is funded in part by The Wallace Foundation, which seeks to support and share effective ideas and practices that expand learning and enrichment opportunities for all people. Its three current objectives are:

- ◆ Strengthen education leadership to improve student achievement
- ◆ Enhance out-of-school learning opportunities
- ◆ Build appreciation and demand for the arts

For more information on these and other related topics, please visit the Knowledge Center at wallacefoundation.org.

About the Foundation Center

Established in 1956 and today supported by close to 550 foundations, the Foundation Center is the nation's leading authority on philanthropy, connecting nonprofits and the grantmakers supporting them to tools they can use and information they can trust. The Center maintains the most comprehensive database on U.S. grantmakers and their grants — a robust, accessible knowledge bank for the sector. It also operates research, education, and training programs designed to advance knowledge of philanthropy at every level. Thousands of people visit the Center's web site each day and are served in its five regional library/learning centers and its network of more than 400 funding information centers located in public libraries, community foundations, and educational institutions in every U.S. state and beyond. For more information, please visit foundationcenter.org or call (212) 620-4230.

Source for all data:

[The Foundation Center](http://TheFoundationCenter.org)

For more information about this advisory, contact communications@foundationcenter.org.