



National Center for  
Families Learning

# COMMUNICATIONS TOOLKIT

Resources to help partner sites talk about their  
NCFL model program with various audiences

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## MAKING MESSAGING COUNT

The value of solid communications can build and strengthen your relationship with the families you serve, funders, and the community. Messaging is most effective when it is shared with the right audience at the right time. Today, organizations have multiple platforms for sharing information. In addition to print, radio, and television media, social media is an outstanding way to engage your constituency and share your story in a cost-effective manner.

While there are many ways of getting your message out, remember that everyone else is using social platforms, so the risk of getting lost in the “noise” is great. Understanding your audience and crafting compelling messaging is more important than ever. Timing is important as well. Doing some research into the analytics on social platforms will tell you the time and day of highest engagement. This is when you will want to schedule your messages.

## MESSAGING

The National Center for Families Learning (NCFL) has a footprint that crosses the United States. With that large sphere of influence comes credibility. You are welcome to tap into the reputation of excellence by touting the Family Learning model and the benefits of your program.

When you want to give a general description or explanation for the Family Learning model, use the information below. The messages are listed by the type of audience with which you are sharing. This information could be included in a: brochure, flier, email, letter to a funder, or social media.

### General/Media

- **The NCFL Family Learning Model**

The NCFL Family Learning model is research-based and consists of adult skill building, child skill building, Parent and Child Together (PACT) Time®, and Parent Time. High impact strategies used in the model include Family Service Learning, digital integration, and deliberate social capital building. Through this program, **[ORGANIZATION]** joins NCFL and organizations in more than 140 other communities across the U.S. in working to eradicate poverty through education solutions for families.

We are proud to join the fight against poverty by equipping community members with skills to get jobs or promotions, build stronger families, and become visible community assets.  
**(GIVE EXAMPLE OF LOCAL SUCCESS STORY).**

- **Empowering the Whole Family**

The mother’s education level is the number one predictor of a child’s academic success. NCFL Family Learning is a proven educational solution through which parents and children work and learn together to achieve economic and civic vitality. Each participating parent sets an educational goal when beginning the program. We’ve seen families **(FILL IN WITH YOUR OWN EXAMPLES OF SUCCESS STORIES).**

### Potential Donors/Elected Leaders

- **Workforce/Employability**

NCFL Family Learning helps parents learn how to better work and learn together with their children, while also building employability, technology, and language skills. 2017 data show half of participating adults got a better job and 53 percent upgraded their skills to earn more money after gaining experience with 40 out of 42 career and technical education skills.

How, you ask? Family Service Learning takes direct aim at the skills gap facing employers and employees across the country. Parents and children are serving together to solve community issues as they learn skills that will advance parents in the workforce and in their goals for economic self-sufficiency.

**[GIVE EXAMPLES OF YOUR FAMILY SERVICE LEARNING PROJECTS AND HOW PARENTS GAINED EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS THROUGH THEM.]**

- **Combatting Chronic Absenteeism/Growing the Pipeline of Skilled Workers**

One of the impacts of the NCFL Family Learning model on participating children is they attend more school days than their peers. This is in part because their parents became more engaged in their children's education and developed systems for continuing learning at home. In Detroit, data shows students who participated in the program at four elementary schools went to school 12 more days than their peers. If the trend continues through high school graduation, students in the program will have attended an additional full year more than students not participating.

This leads to substantial gains in areas such as working collaboratively, communicating effectively, and learning how to learn. Participating students welcomed exploration, gained increasingly complex problem-solving skills, and had a more confident disposition to learning, leading to greater success in the long term. These are all skills and outcomes that will help grow the pipeline of skilled workers required for a demanding global economy.

## **Elected Officials and Community Leaders**

- **Social Capital**

NCFL Family Learning participants build social capital within participating families. This is accomplished through building relationships among families in the program, as well as growing networks between participants and community leaders (e.g., business leaders, elected leaders, law enforcement). Studies show social capital strengthens a community and helps it function more effectively, providing benefits to the common good.

**[GIVE A LOCAL EXAMPLE]**

- **Civic Engagement**

Families participating in NCFL Family Learning become more civically engaged. Through Family Service Learning projects, families research and select a project they feel is important to their neighborhood. For instance, participants have **[INSERT LOCAL FAMILY SERVICE LEARNING PROJECTS HERE]**. Through these efforts, families are empowered to become community advocates and build self-efficacy to lead change. This may result in participants speaking to school boards or city councils, becoming elected leaders, or joining boards.

**[GIVE AN EXAMPLE OF HOW ONE OF YOUR PARTICIPANTS IS NOW INVOLVED IN THE PTA, A STATEWIDE BOARD, PRESENTED TO THE SCHOOL DISTRICT, RAN FOR ELECTED OFFICE, ETC.]**

- **Grade-Level Reading**

Reading at the appropriate grade-level is an important predictor of academic success and high school graduation for students, yet more than 80 percent of low-income children are not proficient at reading by third grade. NCFL Family Learning participants learn how to better help their children with reading and homework, as well as engage in their schooling. Parents learn research-based home literacy strategies to use with their children, and support their literacy and language development through the process. Better parent engagement in a child's academics leads to better success down the road, including in reading.

**[GIVE A LOCAL EXAMPLE]**

## NCFL Family Learning Points to include Not Include:

The components of the Family Learning model involve the entire family. Skill building elements are designed for parents and children to participate in together as well as separately. This allows for each to learn on their own level and with their peers. In addition to the skills that are taught, parents and children gain confidence and personal empowerment, ultimately strengthening the entire family. NCFL has active programming with over 140 community partners in 39 states.

### ***Components:***

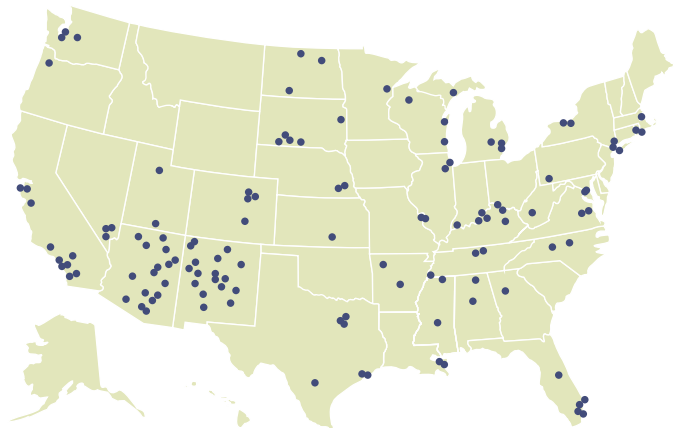
- Adult Skill Building
- Child Skill Building
- Parent Time
- Parent and Child Together Time (PACT Time®)

### ***High impact strategies:***

- Family Service Learning
  - Driven by families together
  - Foster civic engagement
  - Contextualized skill development
  - Build employability skills
  - Improve the community
- Digital integration
- Deliberate social capital building

### ***Outcome and Results:***

- Adult employability and job acquisition
- Adult behavior change (including, but not limited to, engagement in education, growth in family engagement activities in the home, increase in technology use for educational purposes, acquisition and use of library card)
- Child academic growth
- Child behavior improvement (including, but not limited to, attendance)
- Parent self-efficacy
- Parent and child leadership
- Stronger parent/child bonds
- Increases in social capital



## DIGITAL COMMUNICATION PLAN WITH LIMITED RESOURCES

Having a workable plan for sharing your message is better than no plan. If you are limited on resources, it is better to decide what you can do with what you have; knowing that you are working toward a more robust plan down the road. The following are three tips to establishing a communications plan with limited resources.

1. **Designated staff member** – Ask your staff if anyone has an interest in social media and being the coordinator for your program. Many times, individuals have an interest in social media even if it is outside their day-to-day work and would want to be the staff champion for sharing your news.
2. **Interns** – Check with your local college or trade school about a student who would want to volunteer their time assisting to build your communications and social media platform. Your designated staff member could serve as the point person with the student doing the legwork to launch the messaging plan.
3. **Lead parents** – Perhaps you have a lead parent who has an interest in communications or social media and would like to take the lead on creating posts. Your designated staff member will want to have final review, but the parent would take pictures and find stories to share. A parent will have a unique perspective from which information could be shared.

## SOCIAL MEDIA

### Tips to Social Media Success

**Volume of posts:** Post regularly on your social media page(s), but be mindful of audience fatigue. Strive to post no more than once per day from your organization's page on Facebook. However, it is acceptable and encouraged by social media experts to post many more times on Twitter per day.

**Types of posts:** Videos and photos receive much more engagement (likes, shares, comments) than text-only posts. Videos do not need to be professionally produced to be meaningful to your audience. Videos showing families participating in PACT Time or Service Learning Projects can be impactful in building followers, advocates, and eventually, donors.

**Building your community:** When someone comments on your page or one of your posts, respond to the person, addressing him or her by name. Even if your response is simply, "Thank you for commenting!" acknowledging your audience shows they matter to you and are part of your community. Strive to respond within 24 hours to both comments and direct messages.

### Social Media Platforms

The three platforms that are most often used by organizations are Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. There are a variety of nuances to each. Below are the top benefits to consider for each as you choose what platforms will work best for your organization.

1. **Facebook benefits:**
  - a. It is the most widely used platform in world – around 2.3 billion users.
  - b. Free or low cost.

- c. Ability to schedule posts. To use limited time wisely, schedule posts for the week (or whatever timeframe you need).
- d. Easy way to drive audiences to your other platforms such as a website, YouTube, blog.

## 2. **Twitter benefits:**

- a. Users can absorb content more quickly on this platform.
- b. Free avenue for driving audiences to your website or other platforms.
- c. Twitter is commonly used.
- d. Utilizing hashtags is a good way to share your message with an audience not already following you.

## 3. **Instagram benefits:**

- a. Fastest growing platform in the world; it grew by approximately 200 million users in the first six months of 2018.
- b. Instagram syncs with Facebook (creating a time efficiency), allowing you to cross-post your message.
- c. More visually driven, so it is great if your program has photos to share frequently.

## **What To Share on Social Media**

Social media can be a great tool for building credibility for your organization in a variety of ways. Information shared can be useful in highlighting past, present, and future events and successes, all of which blend to build an organization's credibility.

Additionally, the messaging shared should help move the organization's goals forward. The information shared can show the organization's successes, involvement in the community, and impact with families; all of which lead to the organization being seen as credible in the work it does. The following are tips on scheduling and deciding on your message:

1. A picture is worth 1,000 words – According to a study by the software application design firm Buffer, tweets **with images** receive 18% more clicks, 89% more favorites, and 150% more retweets than those without images. Sharing pictures with brief descriptions is many times all that needs to be done to keep your social media messaging fresh. Don't underestimate the value of taking a few minutes to snap photos and share them. Be sure to tag the organizations or people in the photo. This will prompt them to see it and share it, providing your organization with greater engagement and exposure.
2. Take advantage of Facebook and Twitter options to schedule posts. This allows for greater efficiency in the time a staff member or volunteer spends on social media. For example, let's say there are photos from an event to share, a reminder for upcoming services, and a save the date for a speaker coming soon. At one sitting all three could be loaded with photos, and then scheduled to post throughout the week.
3. As a program site, many times families are more in-tune with your information than other social service agencies. Think about other organizations' calendar or what information your organization should take the lead on sharing. Are there deadlines for school registration coming that families need to be reminded of? Is there a community resource opening soon that will benefit families? Start a list and go ahead and write the posts.

## How To Share On Social Media

Sharing on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram all have some differences for consideration. While Facebook is more liberal in terms of character limit, remember that long posts will be ignored. You have an instant to get and hold the audience's attention, so make your posts as concise as possible while still being compelling. Twitter has a character limit of 280 (including spaces and punctuation).

Using photos, tags, and hashtags are a great way to expand your message without running out of characters.

**Hashtag:** is a word or phrase preceded by a hash mark (#), used within a message to identify a keyword, or topic of interest facilitating a search for it. When a user adds a hashtag to their post, it is indexed by social networks and becomes searchable and discoverable by others.

Trending hashtags can boost your audience exposure. For example, instead of creating your own hashtag for a post about parents learning parenting skills, use Google to search “trending hashtags for parenting skills.” If a hashtag is trending, it means the hashtag is being widely used, and as such will carry with it greater traffic and exposure for your post.

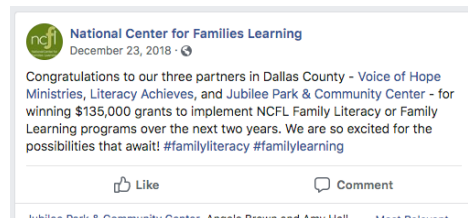
**Tag:** tags are used primarily on Facebook (instead of hashtags).

Tagging a person or organization in a Facebook calls attention to that person or organization as it relates to the post. This allows their connections to know of their relationship to your organization or the post.

In order to tag an organization, you will need to already be connected to them. Simply like their page. Then when you create the post, use their username @ORGANIZATIONPAGE NAME.

Here is a sample post for NCFL where we tagged another organization.

You can find the user name for the organization directly under their page name on the top left side.



Tagging or using hashtags is an outstanding way to share your messages broadly. They are an opportunity for others to like, share, or retweet your messages to audiences that you would not otherwise reach.



## Email Communications

There are several free platforms for sending broadcast emails, such as MailChimp and Constant Contact. As long as you have permission send emails to the recipient, you can load the email list into the platform and use their templates to create a nice-looking, easy-to-read email. These email management systems provide outstanding analytics for your email campaigns. These reports include number of opens, bounces (bad email addresses), and click-throughs (if they click on a link). Pay attention to these and continue to refine your messaging to the needs of your audience.

A few tips to email campaign success:

1. Make sure you have permission to include the individual on your email list
2. Do not over email. We recommend two or three emails a month at maximum. This keeps your organization in front of the audience often but not too much so as to be a nuisance.
3. Only send an email when you have something valuable or helpful to share.
4. Keep your emails short (not a lot of scrolling needed to read the email). Consider using links in the email to allow the reader to read further.
5. List management is important. If someone unsubscribes, do not email to them again.

## Connecting with NCFL

In addition to tagging NCFL on social media, stay connected through one or all of NCFL's emails and blog subscriptions.

- Family Learning Insider e-newsletter is a monthly email that offers readers a snapshot of all the latest activity at NCFL. Included in each newsletter is highlighted news and upcoming events.
- NCFL Literacy NOW is a weekly round-up of the latest news in the fields of education, literacy, and families learning together.
- Hotspot for Families Learning is a blog that includes insights from NCFL staff and advocates.






Subscribing to these three e-news options is available at <https://familieslearning.org/subscribe>.

## Hashtags

General use: **#NCFL** or **#NCFLFamilyLearning**

Family Service Learning projects: **#FamilyServiceLearning**

Tag NCFL when possible:

	@FamiliesLearning		@NCFL		National Center for Families Learning
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## Sample Posts



### Facebook:

Photo + Text

**[@organization]** families are working on [insert Family Service Learning project here] as a **#FamilyServiceLearning** project. They're not just helping **[insert detail]**, they're building community networks and gaining employability skills. **#NCFLFamilyLearning**



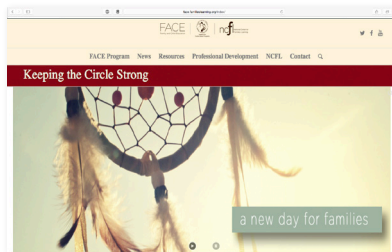
### Twitter:

Families working to improve their neighborhood through **#FamilyServiceLearning** project while also gaining employability skills. **@NCFL**

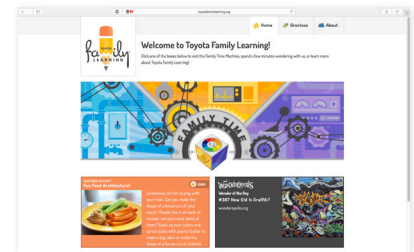
# DIGITAL RESOURCES



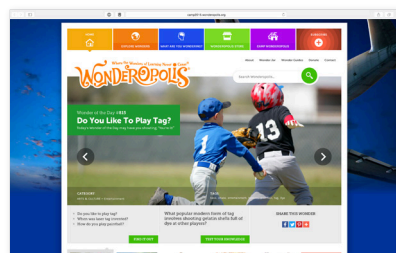
[familieslearning.org](http://familieslearning.org)



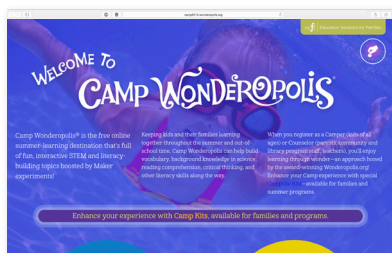
[face.familieslearning.org](http://face.familieslearning.org)



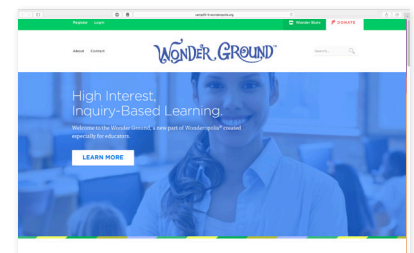
[toyotafamilylearning.org](http://toyotafamilylearning.org)



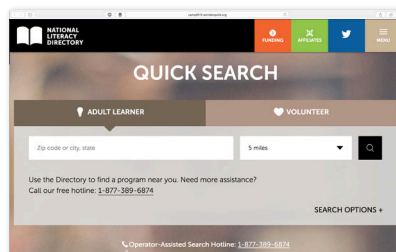
[wonderopolis.org](http://wonderopolis.org)



[camp.wonderopolis.org](http://camp.wonderopolis.org)



[wg.wonderopolis.org](http://wg.wonderopolis.org)



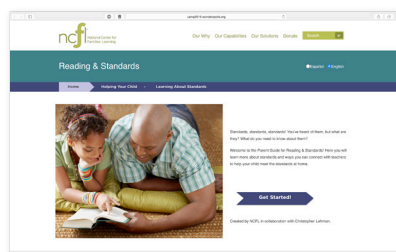
[nationalliteracydirectory.org](http://nationalliteracydirectory.org)



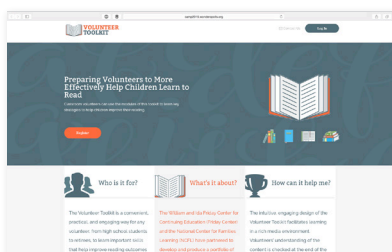
[learn-to-earn-toolkit.org](http://learn-to-earn-toolkit.org)



[familieslearning.org/health](http://familieslearning.org/health)



[bit.ly/readingandstandards](http://bit.ly/readingandstandards)



[readingtoolkit.familieslearning.org](http://readingtoolkit.familieslearning.org)

