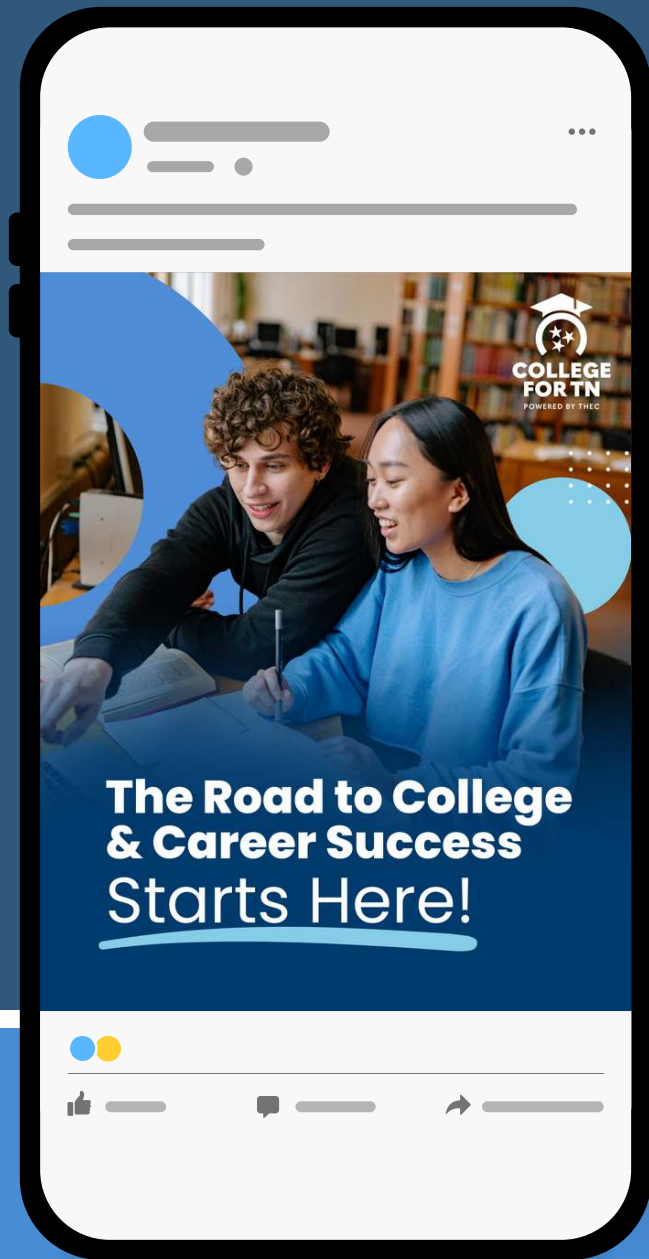




COLLEGE FOR TN
POWERED BY TENNESSEE HIGHER EDUCATION COMMISSION



SOCIAL MEDIA BEST PRACTICES GUIDE

Promoting a College-Going Culture and Student Engagement

PURPOSE

Social media is a powerful tool to inspire students, inform families, and strengthen Tennessee's college-going culture. This guide outlines best practices for using social platforms to:

- Encourage postsecondary awareness and aspiration
- Keep students and families informed and engaged
- Promote events, programs, and resources effectively
- Attract and support future college students across Tennessee

10 CONTENT BEST PRACTICES

DON'T FORGET TO CHECK OUT THEC'S SOCIAL MEDIA TOOLKITS!

1. MAKE COLLEGE
FEEL POSSIBLE

6. VISUALS MATTER
& MAKE IT EASY

2. BE CLEAR, FRIENDLY,
AND ENCOURAGING

7. TIMING & FREQUENCY

3. SET CLEAR GOALS, KNOW
YOUR AUDIENCE &
ENCOURAGE STUDENT
INVOLVEMENT

8. SAFETY & PRIVACY

4. CREATE AN ENGAGING
CONTENT MIX

9. USE RELEVANT
HASHTAGS & TAGS

5. CONSISTENCY
BUILDS TRUST

10. TRACK & ADJUST

1. MAKE COLLEGE FEEL POSSIBLE

Content should consistently reinforce that college and postsecondary pathways are achievable for all students.

- Use inclusive language and diverse visuals – “College” means a four-year university, community college, or technical program
- Highlight multiple pathways (four-year, two-year, TCATs, certificates, apprenticeships)
- Avoid implying only one path to success; celebrate all student goals.
- Share real student stories and testimonials
- Inspire students to see college as achievable and an exciting step toward their future.

2. BE CLEAR, FRIENDLY, AND ENCOURAGING

Avoid overly technical or bureaucratic language.

- Write the way you would speak to a student or parent
- Use plain language and short sentences
- Focus on encouragement, not pressure
- Promote **TN Direct Admissions** and **College Application Month** events in the fall, **College Planning Night**, **College & Career Signing Day**, and **Adult Path to College** in the spring, and **FAFSA completion** year-round.
- Celebrate student milestones: acceptances, scholarships, and college visits.

3. SET CLEAR GOALS, KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE & ENCOURAGE STUDENT INVOLVEMENT

- **Primary:** Current students and families
- **Secondary:** Alumni, faculty, local community, and partners
- Use teen-friendly language and visuals that also communicate clearly to parents.
- Student takeovers during college visits or fairs (**with staff oversight**).
- Feature student-created content: videos, photos, testimonials
- Recognize and tag student clubs involved in college prep/co-op, etc.





4. CREATE AN ENGAGING CONTENT MIX

- **Student Spotlights:** Interviews or quotes about their college journey
- **College Facts & Tips:** Quick posts about deadlines, FAFSA advice & help sessions, or essays
- **Behind-the-Scenes:** Campus tours, prep sessions, or college fairs
- **Celebrations:** Acceptance letters, signing day photos, scholarships (with permission)
- **Tie posts to TN Key Dates:** April 1 TN Promise opens, October 1 FAFSA, September is TN College Application & Exploration Month, Third Friday in September is Why Apply Day

Tip: Use the relevant social media toolkit for ready-to-go graphics, sample posts, and messaging ideas.

5. CONSISTENCY BUILDS TRUST

- Post regularly (even if less frequently)
- Maintain consistent tone, school colors, and branding
- Use the same hashtags and terminology across platforms

6. VISUALS MATTER & MAKE IT EASY

- Prioritize authentic photos/videos of students over stock images
- Incorporate school colors and branding
- Add captions or text overlays for accessibility and clarity
- Include links to apply or learn more about events when appropriate

7. TIMING & FREQUENCY

- Post consistently: 3–5 times per week
- Use stories and reels for timely updates (deadlines, events, key reminders)
- Schedule posts in advance for all key dates or upcoming state deadlines

8. SAFETY & PRIVACY

- Obtain written permission before posting student names, photos, or videos
- Avoid sharing sensitive personal details
- Follow district and state policies on student media



9. USE RELEVANT HASHTAGS & TAGS

- #Classof20XX #CollegeSigningDay #FAFSAFrenzy #TNAdultPathtoCollege
- Tag THEC, local colleges, scholarship organizations, and education partners

10. TRACK & ADJUST

- Monitor engagement (likes, shares, comments) to see what resonates
- Collect student feedback on inspiring or helpful content
- Adjust posting strategies each semester based on results

Toolkit Reminder: Always check the THEC provided toolkits for pre-made graphics, sample captions, and ready-to-use messaging. This ensures consistency and saves time while maximizing impact!

RECOMMENDED PLATFORMS & AUDIENCES



INSTAGRAM

Primary audience:
Students, young adults

- Reels, stories, and carousels perform best
- Use visuals, short captions, and clear calls to action
- Feature student spotlights, reminders, and behind-the-scenes content



FACEBOOK

Primary audience: Families,
educators, community members

- Longer captions are acceptable
- Event promotion and informational posts perform well
- Share links, deadlines, and recap photos



X (TWITTER)

Primary audience: Education leaders, partners, policymakers

- Share announcements, data points, and event updates
- Tag partners and institutions
- Use concise messaging

BEST PRACTICES

FOR CAPTIONS:

- Lead with the most important information
- Use emojis sparingly and purposefully (if appropriate)
- End with a clear call to action (Register, Learn more, Save the date)

EXAMPLE:

College application season is here. Whether you're exploring options or ready to apply, help is available every step of the way. Join us for a free college planning workshop this Saturday.

POSTING FREQUENCY GUIDELINES

- Instagram: 3–5 times per week
- Facebook: 2–4 times per week
- X (Twitter): 3–7 times per week

Quality matters more than quantity.

ACCESSIBILITY & INCLUSION

- Add alt text to images
- Use captions on videos
- Avoid acronyms without explanation
- Ensure graphics are easy to read on mobile

FOLLOW THEC ON SOCIAL MEDIA & AMPLIFY OUR CONTENT

DON'T FORGET TO CHECK OUT THEC'S SOCIAL MEDIA TOOLKITS!

Helping spread the message is one of the easiest ways to strengthen Tennessee's college-going culture. We encourage schools, districts, colleges, and community partners to follow THEC and its programs on social media and actively share and promote our content.

WHY IT MATTERS

- Expands reach to students and families across the state
- Reinforces consistent, trusted messaging
- Helps important deadlines, events, and resources reach more people

HOW PARTNERS CAN HELP

- Follow THEC and program accounts on social media
- Like, comment on, and share posts to increase visibility
- Repost graphics, videos, and event promotions
- Tag THEC and relevant programs when sharing related content

ANCHOR CONTENT AROUND TENNESSEE'S KEY DATES

Planning posts in advance ensures students, families, and the community stay informed about key college-going opportunities. Use THEC's social media toolkits to easily align social media content with these key dates:

APRIL 1 – TN PROMISE APPLICATION OPENS

- Two years of tuition-free community college for eligible Tennessee high school grads
- Needs to be completed for TN Direct Admissions eligibility
- Promote TN Promise messaging

SEPTEMBER – COLLEGE APPLICATION & EXPLORATION MONTH (HOSTED LOCALLY; PROMOTED BY THEC)

- Week 1: Intro to College Week
- Week 2: Exploration of College Week
- Week 3: Why Apply Week
- Third Friday in September: Why Apply Day
- Week 4: Claim Your Spot TN Week
- Week 5: What's Next Week

USE THE **COLLEGE APPLICATION & EXPLORATION MONTH TOOLKIT** FOR MESSAGING!

OCTOBER 1 – FAFSA OPENS

- Promote completing the FAFSA and spring deadlines
- Use the FAFSA Frenzy Toolkit for messaging

NOVEMBER 2 – COMPLETE THE TN PROMISE APPLICATION

FOUR PATH TO COLLEGE EVENTS EACH YEAR

- **TN College Application & Exploration Month** – September
- **TN FAFSA Frenzy** – October through April 1
- **TN Signing Day** – Spring
- **TN College & Career Planning Night** – Scheduled locally, Spring or Fall

OFFICIAL THEC & PROGRAM ACCOUNTS

TENNESSEE HIGHER EDUCATION COMMISSION (THEC)

X (Twitter): @TNHigherEd

LinkedIn: Tennessee Higher Education Commission

YouTube: @TNHigherEd

TENNESSEE RECONNECT

X (Twitter): @TNReconnect

Facebook: TNReconnect

Instagram: TNReconnect

COLLEGEFORTN

X (Twitter): @College4TN

YouTube: @GearUpTN

Facebook: College4TN

Instagram: College4TN

TIPS FOR SHARING CONTENT EFFECTIVELY

- Add a brief, encouraging caption when resharing posts
- Share content during high-traffic times such as afternoons and evenings
- Pin important posts or deadlines when possible
- Encourage students and families to follow accounts directly

Working together helps ensure students and families across Tennessee see consistent, timely, and inspiring messages about postsecondary opportunities.

IDEAS TO PROMOTE A COLLEGE-GOING CULTURE

CONTENT IDEAS

- "College looks like this" student stories
- First-generation student spotlights
- FAFSA and financial aid reminders
- Campus visits and college exploration moments
- Career outcomes and success stories

MESSAGE THEMES

- College is for you
- You have options
- Help is available
- Your future matters



IDEAS TO KEEP STUDENTS & FAMILIES ENGAGED

POST ABOUT EVENTS EARLY AND OFTEN

- Announce events at least 2–3 weeks in advance (FAFSA Completion Events, Help Days, Open House, etc.)
- Post reminders one week before, three days before, and day-of
- Use graphics with date, time, and location clearly displayed

USE VISUALS STRATEGICALLY

- Bright, welcoming graphics
- Photos of real students and families when possible
- Short videos (under 60 seconds) explaining what to expect at an event

MAKE IT INTERACTIVE

- Polls and question stickers (Instagram Stories)
- "Did you know?" posts
- Countdown graphics to major deadlines

IDEAS FOR ATTRACTING NEW STUDENTS

SHOW, DON'T JUST TELL

- Share photos from events, campus visits, and workshops
- Post recap albums or reels after events
- Highlight energy, community, and belonging

PARTNER AMPLIFICATION

- Tag schools, colleges, and community partners
- Encourage partners to share your posts
- Cross-post major announcements

CELEBRATE MILESTONES

- Application submissions
- FAFSA completion
- College acceptance moments
- Graduation and transition moments

FINAL REMINDER

Social media should feel welcoming, hopeful, and empowering. Every post is an opportunity to remind Tennessee students and families that college and postsecondary success are within reach!