



A STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE TO TWITTER CHATS

for Minority Serving Institutions

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“Imagine a business networking event— but without a dress code and with a keyboard instead of a bar. The same social customs apply—courtesy and respect—and it’s a great way to meet new people with similar interests. There are Twitter chats in almost every industry imaginable.”

*–Nicole Miller,
“Twitter Chats 101”*

What is a Twitter Chat?

A Twitter Chat is an online conversation that brings together various Twitter users to engage in a robust discussion regarding a specific topic. Twitter Chats are pre-planned events that are promoted via social media that usually last for an hour and use a designated [hashtag \(#\)](#) for each tweet. During the Twitter Chat, the discussion moderator will pose questions that should prompt responses from participants and special guest discussants. The moderator is typically responsible for engaging participants with the topic questions and encouraging interaction among participants.

Why host a Twitter Chat?

Twitter Chats are fairly easy to host and generate lots of buzz and discussion around any given topic. Twitter Chats are also a great way to disseminate information and engage broader audiences. With the advancement of technology and the growing importance of social media, Twitter Chats are an invaluable way of networking that allow participants to grow their social and professional circles with people that share similar interests.

How do I select a Twitter Chat topic and #hashtag?

When considering whether or not to host a Twitter Chat, it is important to consider what your discussion topic will be. Twitter Chat topics should be interesting, informative, and captivating. Your intended audience will also influence your topic, as you want to engage individuals in discussions that are relevant to them or about which they want to learn. Twitter Chats can also be used to engage a particular group of people similar to an in-person panel. In this situation, your topic would be one that unifies your guests around a specific discussion.

When creating a #hashtag, you want to use something that is easy to remember, descriptive, and short (keep in mind tweets are limited to 140 characters and you’ll be using your #hashtag on each of the tweets in the discussion). At the Penn Center for Minority Serving Institutions (CMSI), we use the #MSIchat hashtag as it lets our audience know that the chat is related to a series of Twitter Chats about Minority Serving Institutions. It is short and simple, and it connects all of our Twitter Chats together.

If you will be hosting a series of Twitter Chats, you might want to consider creating a hashtag that can be reused and is not specifically linked to any particular topic, such as #MSIchat. However, if you will only be hosting a one-time chat, you can create a more topic specific hashtag. If the chat will be hosted by an institution or organization, the chat hashtag can also be used as a branding tool. For example, if CMSI wanted a branded hashtag, we would simply switch it to #CMSIchat.

“Twitter is a great place to start if you want to build your own PLN (Personal Learning Network). There are lots of educators out there, covering all types of different subject matter and they have all embraced Twitter as their weapon of choice when it comes to sharing great resources and opinions.”

*–Kirsten Winkler,
“How To Plan And Start Your Own Twitter Chat”*

What happens after I select a Twitter Chat topic?

After a Twitter Chat topic has been decided, create a title for the chat. Preferably, the title should be short and sweet while still capturing the essence of the topic. The more creative, the better—this is important for increasing audience engagement. For example, framing the title as a question can help create curiosity. Avoid vague titles, as the clearer and more descriptive you are, the better you’ll be able to attract appropriate and interested audiences. Keep in mind that the trajectory of the discussion will often be based on the language/keywords used in the title.

Next, develop 5-8 strong questions that will be used to direct the flow of the Twitter Chat discussion. These questions should be provocative and risky, open-ended, and developed for a general audience. Remember, the value of a discussion is directly linked to the questions you create. In-depth discussion requires questions that facilitate rather than foreclose discussion, so avoid easy questions that can be answered with a simple Google search. On the flip side, questions that are too specialized make it difficult for general audiences to engage; as such, do not use scholarly jargon or terms unfamiliar to the general public.

Once questions are finalized, you may choose to share these questions with any special guest discussants so that they can start thinking about and prepare for what they want to share during the chat. Twitter Chats are often fast paced and there are several threads of conversations happening at once. Therefore, encouraging discussants to prepare for the Twitter Chat in advance will ensure that they use their time responding to others and engaging with them rather than worrying about their own responses to the questions. Limiting responses to 140 characters can be challenging, so preparing in advance is highly encouraged!



Penn Center for MSIs
@CenterForMSIs



Q1: Why is important to talk about mental health, specifically at HBCUs? #MSIchat

3:05 PM - 22 Sep 2015



Dr. Larry J. Walker
@LarryJWalker2



A1: Some HBCUs educate students from communities that may lack comprehensive mental health support services.

#MSIchat

3:06 PM - 22 Sep 2015



“The date and time of chats is determined by the organizer of the chat. A lot of times they poll those on the hashtag about what day and time they would prefer.”

*–Jerry Blumengarten
“How To Take Part in
or Moderate a Chat
on Twitter”*

When is the best time to host a Twitter Chat?

When thinking about hosting a Twitter Chat, consider the following:

- **Availability of key participants: the moderator and invited discussants.** Often, the people hosting or involved in the Twitter Chat are a major draw for pulling in audiences so it is important to work within their schedules.
- **Current or trending topics.** Sometimes it makes sense to host a Twitter Chat during a specific time of year in order to engage with current events or monthly themes. For example, May is Mental Health Awareness Month; during the month of May, a conversation discussing this topic would encourage engagement and would help bring more awareness to topic. It also helps keep the discussion relevant to the audience.
- **Time zones.** Keep in mind that Twitter Chats happen at a specific time of day. When selecting this time, be sure to consider how the time of day would impact participation for someone who lives in a different time zone. Try to select a time that would be a reasonable hour for all U.S. time zones.
- **Target audience availability.** Your intended audience will also inform your time selection. For example, if your intended audience is comprised of working professionals, then it might make sense to host a Twitter Chat during the lunch hour or at the end of the day.

Who participates in Twitter Chats?

When developing a Twitter Chat topic, spend time identifying individuals, scholars/researchers, organizations, student groups, and general groups of people who could benefit from participating in a discussion about the subject. These people could either be part of the intended audience or invited to participate as discussants. For example, if your Twitter Chat was focused on sexual violence prevention at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), you could start by generating a list of point people at various HBCU campuses who might work with students regarding sexual violence, including Title 9 coordinators, student groups against rape, and anyone else on HBCU campuses that may have an interest or investment in this topic. You would also want to generate a list of people who could benefit from exposure to the information shared during the Twitter Chat, such as policy makers, administrators, etc.

Once this list is generated, it is very useful to create a spreadsheet to organize and facilitate outreach. This spreadsheet should contain the following information, separated by columns:

- First Name
- Last Name
- Email Address
- Organization
- Twitter Handle (if you have it)

“Good moderators have solid questions prepared. They do their homework, thinking of ideas and knowing the pulse of the participants.”

–Matt Miller, “How to be a rockstar Twitter chat moderator”

You can then use this list to email and tweet directly at your intended audience to inform them of the upcoming Twitter Chat. You can also use this list to identify and contact potential discussants.

What is the role of a discussant?

A discussant is a person selected to serve as a special guest expert. Discussants can be involved in the planning process by asking them to provide feedback on the discussion questions. However, the primary role of a discussant is to participate in the chat as a discussion leader. Discussants help ensure that there is someone knowledgeable about the topic contributing information and engaging the participants with the topic. Selecting an appropriate discussant is important because audiences look to them for guidance in the discussion.

What is the best way to advertise Twitter Chats?

Before you begin advertising, you should create a social media block that can be shared on social media and in email. Though the Twitter Chat will of course take place on Twitter, you may use other social media platforms such as Facebook or Instagram to spread awareness and increase outreach. A social media block is essentially a small electronic flyer in the form of an image that is used to promote the pertinent details of the chat: discussion title, date, time, and chat hashtag. The ideal size and aspect ratio of this image varies from platform to platform and changes as said platforms change their display standards, but a good rule of thumb is a 2:1 aspect ratio that has a resolution of 1200x600 pixels. This will ensure your social media block is displayed in high quality without being cut off in newsfeed streams.

Targeted outreach to key stakeholders via email collected in your spreadsheet and tweeting directly at them are great ways to start advertising. Furthermore, advertisement via other social media platforms and through your general network is essential. Finally, partnering with groups that have a demonstrated interest in the Twitter Chat topic is a useful way to take advantage of their networks to increase your audience size. Sometimes merely asking an organization or institution to highlight your Twitter Chat can lead to a huge turnout.

Culturally Responsive Support Services at AANAPISIs
–a Penn Center for MSIs Twitter Chat–

Tuesday, May 3
5:00pm-6:00 p.m. EST
Join in the discussion using the hashtag:

#MSIchat
@CenterForMSIs

Penn GSE Graduate School of Education
Center for MSIs

“The . is the most misunderstood piece of punctuation on Twitter.”

*–Gary Vaynerchuk,
“The Number One Mistake Everybody Makes on Twitter”*

What should I keep in mind as I tweet?

Each tweet can consist of no more 140 characters including handles and hashtags. Questions should be numbered to keep them organized and include the chat hashtag. When responding to a question, participants should be directed to reference the number of the question which is being answered and include the chat hashtag.

For example, here is an appropriate question-answer pair:

Q1: *What is STEM? #MSIchat*

A1: *STEM fields include science, technology, engineering and math. #MSIchat*

You can also link to websites, reports, and other media in your tweets to support your statements, highlight examples, or provide further evidence. Images and links each take up 23 characters of a tweet’s 140 allotted characters no matter how large or long they are (Twitter shortens links automatically).

Other things to keep in mind:

- All of your tweets should include the chat hashtag somewhere in the tweet. Otherwise, participants will not be able to see what you tweeted in a systematic way.
- Encourage the moderator, discussants, and participants to make their Twitter profile public. If a profile is private, only those who follow that individual will be able to read their tweets.
- [Avoid making the most common Twitter Chat mistake:](#) in order for everyone to see your response about or to a specific twitter account, you should include a period (.) at the beginning of your tweet to ensure it is seen. Without this period, only those Twitter users who follow both your account and the other person’s accounts will be able to see that tweet. This is only the case if your tweet starts with a handle and does not apply if the handle is inserted elsewhere in the tweet. For example, if I tweet the following “@CenterforMSIs I love the work that you do! #MSIchat,” this tweet will only be seen by people who follow me and the Center for MSIs’ account. However, if I tweet “.@CenterforMSIs I love the work that you do! #MSIchat,” everyone will be able to see the tweet regardless of whether they follow both my account and the Center’s account.

What is the best platform to manage a Twitter Chat?

We recommend using [TweetDeck](#). Twitter owns this platform so it integrates seamlessly with your Twitter account. Using TweetDeck provides you with an easy way to follow the conversation by searching your hashtag and creating a column that will update in real time while allowing for monitoring of notifications, home feed, and profile.

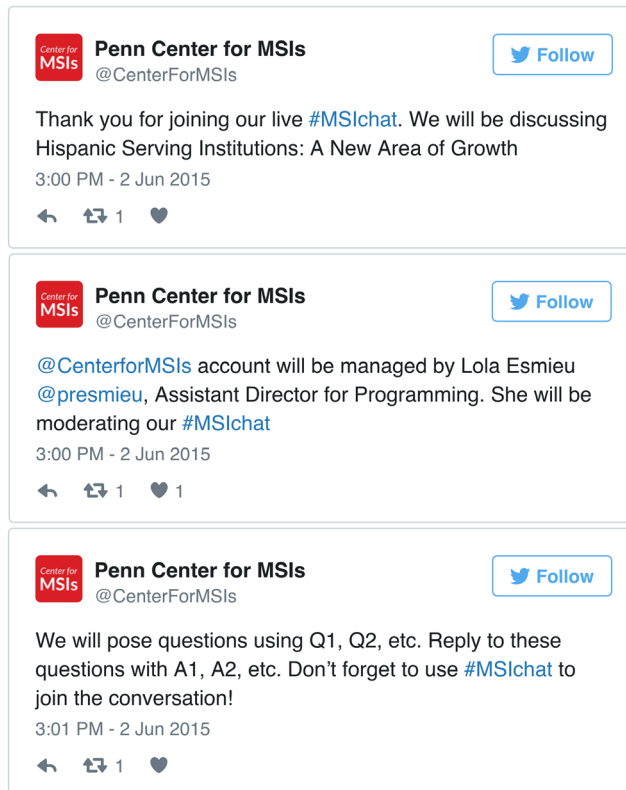
“Like any other long-term social media endeavor we get involved in, hosting and promoting a Twitter chat requires a lot of patience and persistence. Just put lots of time and effort into making it work and it definitely will!”

–Ann Smarty, “5 Steps to Hosting Successful Twitter Chats: Your Ultimate Guide”

What happens during the actual Twitter Chat?

When your Twitter Chat begins, the moderator should send a series of tweets that do the following:

- Welcome all participants to the chat
- Introduce special guest discussants
- Encourage participants to introduce themselves
- Explain how the chat will run and how the audience should engage



What happens after a Twitter Chat?

Once your Twitter Chat is over, you can capture and archive the conversation by creating a chat recap through [Storify](#). Storify is a website that allows you to search for specific social media accounts and hashtags and then allows you to download any posts and tweets that were shared under that profile or hashtag. By doing this, you create what essentially becomes a transcript of the entire chat. You can then share the link to the Storify recap to engage people who may have missed the chat.

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