# 2012 Strategic Thinking…Strategic Speaking Webinar
# Webinar Followup Questions – By Topic.

**VOST Questions: Kris Eriksen**

**Question:** From what I understood, VOSTs are mobilized and demobed. They distribute official information and report to the lead PIO.  It looks like they are an official part of the fire organization.  How do they get away with not following the same agency policies the team has agreed to in the MOU?

**Answer:**  In context, VOST members are gathered to get them started (mobilized), and it's respectful to let them know when wrapping up and are no longer needed (demobed).

VOST members are public volunteers who have been organized to help the incident, just as people volunteer to help in Red Cross Shelters or at food banks. As volunteers outside of ROSS, they do not have fire qualifications, never come to a fire camp, and may not be centrally located (virtual).  Like any member of the public with an interest, they grab info the Team provides and pushes it to friends and other sites via their predetermined SM tools.  Anyone can do that, but the VOSTS are a little more organized to help the cause.

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**Question:**  Will / can VOST teams get paid by the P-code?

**Answer:** VOST members are volunteers and don't need to be paid.  Organizing them as a module or as SMEs that can be paid by the P-code is being looked at, but likely won't happen for a long time, if at all.

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**Question:**  Where does the local unit PAO fit into the VOST organization?

**Answer:** The PAO should be told about the VOST and the team's plan to engage in social media, to the same extent you would normally.  Remember, the VOST is not a public-facing entity. No one should see them or know they are there except the team, PIO's and the PAOs.

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**Question:** Can the VOST members create a Facebook site for a Forest Service fire when FS guidance does not allow Facebook sites?

**Answer:** FS guidance was recently updated.  Look at the FS Communications documents on the PIO Bulletin Board on the NFC site for updates.

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**Question:**  Are VOST's available only for fire incidents or can Fire Prevention Education Teams use them as well?

**Answer:** They could be used for anything. They are most applicable for specific events that warrants a need for SM, or perhaps for building ongoing relationships like what a prevention team may establish (with concurrence of the host agency). The Eriksen VOST is focusing on fire specific use; however, a prevention team would be a similar application. An emergency operations center in Oklahoma formed one called OKVOST and become activate for tornados and other events.

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**Question:** How does a PIO find/"generate" a VOST?  Will the IMT Lead PIO know how?  Is Eriksen VOST avail to other teams?

**Answer:** This is a very new resource. At the moment, the Eriksen VOST Team is offering to provide an experienced lead person to an IMT that would like to form a VOST.  That lead will help build a VOST for other teams.  It may not be able to help everyone, but it's desirable to assist as many as possible. Contact Kris Eriksen at keriksen@fs.fed.us for assistance.

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**Question:** How are volunteers for VOST screened/interviewed/selected? What type of background experience is needed?

**Answer:** VOST members are referred to as "trusted agents." It's important the lead for the VOST team knows a lot of people in the social media world. When Jeff Phillips, Eriksen's VOST leader, built the VOST, he pulled people he knew from online interactions and observations. He had not met all of them physically, but through many online interactions he felt he knew them. These were his trusted agents. This is why, for now, the Portland NIMO is providing leaders for those who want a VOST. That leader will be well connected in SM and able build a team he/she trusts who also has the needed tools and skills.

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**Question:** Who monitors and tracks VOST during the incident?

**Answer:** In the case of the Shadow Lake Fire, the Lead IO (Kris) did because it was her experiment. Next time, a web 2.0 Lead will be responsible for all the digital information output- things like Inciweb and the VOST. In terms of time, the lead IO could easily feed the VOST and be the lead information officer. It reduced workload significantly.

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**Question:** Has anyone given thought to hire a PR firm to be a VOST during a large, complex fire?

**Answer:** Considering the budget climate, it's probably not likely. Oddly, Kris comes from a PR background and is working with a PR firm to provide the Eriksen VOST a real world non-profit client to practice with. If the Portland NIMO Team is to practice pushing messages, tracking and using analytics, why not use a good charitable cause?

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**Question:** If an IO were to get assigned to a fire where there's no pre-season VOST set up, is setting one up then still possible?

**Answer:** It is possible to set up a VOST on the fly. If you are active in SM, and want to ask for volunteers who know how to do so, you can set up. The key is to find one person to be your lead. Let THAT person (hopefully very connected in SM channels) build you a team of people they think would be good. And you don't need to have everyone at once. Start with the first three and have them add people as they find them. Just ensure everyone has received your very clear leader's intent and protocols and that everyone agrees to them.

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**Question:** When the Portland NIMO VOST sets up, will it remain in place once you rotate out or does it rotate with you?

**Answer:** That's a good question and the answers are evolving. Is Eriksen VOST "hers" as the NIMO IO, or does it stay with the incident? What happens if the NIMO transitions with another team and the fire goes on? We're trying to sort that out. At Shadow Lake, the incident was turned back to the forest. "Final" messages were posted that said this would be our last posting and referred people to Inciweb and the forest website (which the forest was maintaining).

If there was a transition, the Eriksen VOST would be left with the incident, if the VOST members were willing. Remember, as volunteers we can't order them to do anything, and their relationship is with the person who set them up in the first place. Eriksen is working on creating some 2nd tier teams, "depth on the bench" so to speak, so if an incident goes long, new people can be brought in to allow others to rotate out, without losing continuity.

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**Question:** How best to handle social media use by fireline crew? (e.g. pictures taken on fireline and posted online)

**Answer:** We can't control what fireline personnel post on social media sites, but we can emphasize the importance of posting responsibly. Here are some tools you can use to help convey your message.

- The USFS Memo: Firefighter Photography, Videography and Use of Social Media http://www.nifc.gov/PIO_bb/Agencies/USFS/SMLetter.doc addresses the use of social media by incident personnel.
- The DOI Policy on Non-Official/ Personal Use of Social Media and Social Networking http://www.doi.gov/notices/Social-Media-Policy.cfm
- The Firefighter Photography, Video and Social Media Use document is also a nice handout, also posted on the PIO Bulletin Board. .

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**Question:** Some teams are using Gmail and Google Docs. Windows Live email, Windows Web Apps, and Microsoft SkyDrive as alternative sets of tools. Are there similar tools that can be used? If so, which ones?

**Answer:** Many teams are primarily using Gmail and Google Docs. Other teams have tried other tools; however, challenges have occurred when teams used tools some incident personnel were unable to access on agency computers. Keep in mind, all agencies are different and may have different regulations as to what you can and can't use. Additionally, *"if incident specific social media accounts are created, they should not include agency logos."*

The 2012 "Interagency Lessons Learned on Using Social Media on Wildland Fire Incidents" document on the NIFC PIO Bulletin Board (http://www.nifc.gov/PIO_bb/social_media.html) talks about some tools the Virtual Operations Support Teams (VOST) used. These include:

- Skype (for ongoing streaming instant messaging type conversation),
- Google docs (used to keep a virtual 214 where everyone logs what they are doing and keeps all other documents related to the group like contact info, objectives, passwords, etc),
- Box or Dropbox (for simple download of photos, videos, etc. and larger items for posting),
- Keepstream or Storify (to serve as virtual documentation. All monitoring results are pushed here for the record);
- Gmail (a group account used to pass along press releases, pictures, maps etc. for posting);
- Flickr or Picasa (for storing large amounts of high res photos that can be linked back to Inciweb or Facebook);
- YouTube, Vimeo or MyFireVideo (used to store and link to video).

If you have suggestions on what tools you've used successfully, you can share your experiences in the MyFireCommunity Public Information Officers neighborhood

- (http://www.myfirecommunity.net/Neighborhood.aspx?ID=53) or
- Or in the DHS First Responder Communities of Practice Make America Safer through Social Media Online Forum at https://communities.firstresponder.gov/web/guest.

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**Question:** How is the "Official Fire Information Logo" protected? What would prevent anyone from downloading it and using it for their site?

**Answer:** The "Official Fire Information logo" is not currently protected, and its use and functionality are still being tested.

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**Question:** Inciweb is a great tool; however, a lot of other social media sites are in use. Is there a chance the PIO Bulletin Board could list links with information about what different agencies are allowing?

**Answer:** Agency and host unit policies vary, so it's best to check with the host unit's public affairs officer for guidance. The following agency resources are available:

- USDA Social Media Tools and Resources - http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usda/usdahome?navid=USDA_STR
- USDA Photography Policy - http://www.ocio.usda.gov/directives/doc/DR1480-001.htm
- DOI Policy and Guidance
    - DM Part 386 (Web Management) Chapter 3 (Web Standards and Guidelines) - http://206.131.241.18/elips/release/3700.htm
    - DOI Web Standards Handbook (pdf, 522k) - http://inpniscsfern1.nps.doi.net:7000/sites/Web/NPS%20Web%20Documents/386_DM_3_Web_Handbook_Rev_1_April_2007.pdf
    - DOI Social Media Policy - http://www.doi.gov/notices/Social-Media-Policy.cfm
    - DOI Social Media Guidebook (pdf, 260k) - http://www.doi.gov/notices/loader.cfm?csModule=security/getfile&PageID=239607

- BIA-NIFC Social Media Policies & Guidance – (internal link available to BIA employees only) - http://inside.bia.gov/socialmedia/index.htm
- BLM New Media Guide - http://www.blm.gov/wo/st/en/info/socialmedia.html
- NPS Social Media Resources (internal link available to NPS employees only) – http://inpniscsfern1.nps.doi.net:7000/sites/Web/Pages/socialmedia.aspx
- USFWS Social Media Resources http://www.fws.gov/home/socialmedia/ and Blog Policy - http://www.fws.gov/policy/115fw9.html

If you'd like to learn more about how to use social media tools, the NIFC PIO Bulletin Board (http://www.nifc.gov/PIO_bb/social_media.html) includes lessons learned and general tips. Additional resources are available on HowTo.Gov - http://www.howto.gov/social-media & http://www.howto.gov/training

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**209 Info –Randy Eardley**

**Question:** Will the public be able to go online to access the 209?

**Answer:** The public will not be able to access current-year 209s. As with the current Sit/209 program, access requires a log-on and password to view reports for the current calendar year. However, past year reports can be downloaded from the FAMWEB Sit/209 home page in an Access database without a log-on.

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**Question:** How do we know which 209 is the new 209? Is it listed with a separate form number?

**Answer:** When the NIMS 209 replaces the older fire 209, likely this month (May), it will completely replace it in all instances, including FAMWEB. If you are on a fire and call up a 209 form after implementation, you will only get the new 209, which will be larger and contain more information than the older version. Additionally, each 209 comes with a program-generated date and time stamp and will be the most current version.

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**Question:** There seems to be a reluctance to fully report the fires being managed for “other than full suppression” … yet it is a big part of what is happening locally and nationally. It definitely impacts the incident we are on and attempting to paint the big picture for affected public. I would think a daily, rather than a weekly tally of those on the daily sitrep would be helpful.

Is there anything with substance being prepared about how to measure success on a fire that is being managed for other than full suppression that can be used and understood by the general public? The strategy can be understood, but the costs of the incident are tough to understand. Some way to relate cost, cost per acre, cost per day, or something else that can relate to the strategy and help define success is needed.

**Answer:** There is no reluctance to report on multiple objective fires so much as finding the most useful and informative way to do so, without bogging down or overloading the sit report with information on fires that may not change significantly from day to day over a long period of time. Measuring success in a consistent manner across fires that may be vastly different in their objectives also poses challenges. Finding the most effective and meaningful method to report on these fires is a process of evolution and discussions will likely be ongoing for at least the near-term future.

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**2012 Themes**

**Question:** In regards to theme # 6, referring to community members reducing fire risk. A fire ecologist explained the difference of fire risk (the potential for a fire to start i.e. a campfire, lightning strike, or a downed power line) and fire hazard (the fuels i.e. dense trees or underbrush, wood stacked on the porch, pine needles on the roof, etc.) Is it possible to change the term from risk to hazard so our publics and upcoming PIO's PAO's are learning the correct terms?

**Answer:** It’s a good point and we can make the change from this point on.

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**Resource Requests:**

**Question:** I am interested in InciWeb updates and training. How do I learn about the changes being made and future training?

**Answer**: For specific questions regarding InciWeb, it’s best to ask your agency/ bureau point of contact. If you aren’t familiar with who that is, your regional or national contact can direct you.

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**Question:** Often, my problem is not distributing information; it is getting new, current information to share. How do we help FMOs, ICs and Ops Chiefs understand and assist with our need for more frequent updates?

**Answer:** Great question! Everyone is busy and important, which makes access to timely information difficult. Some strategies that may prove helpful are to highlight team’s success and reward their participation. Working with the local PAO, team liaisons and demonstrating the needs of your audience to leadership can be of assistance also.

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**Question:** As issues or concerns arise during fire season, is it possible to address or post aids to the PIO Bulletin Board, such as talking points, background information, etc.?

**Answer:** The answer is yes, it's something we've been trying to do, but we haven't been consistent with it yet. We welcome requests from the field for specific kinds of information and talking points, especially those that have wide applicability to the PIO community.

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**Question:** On the Bulletin Board, under what's new -- "Agency-specific Information," the National Association of State Foresters, and the US Fish & Wildlife Service cannot be clicked on for more info. Why is this, and as an outreach person for FWS Fire, how can I help?

**Answer:** Thank you for bringing this to our attention. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife is now linked to: http://www.fws.gov/fire/

We are awaiting an appropriate link for NASF, but the National Association of State Foresters has a new Communications Director who can be contacted at:

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444 N. Capitol St NW, Suite 540
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(202) 624-5417
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