



SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY AND GUIDELINES

Social media is a vital part of communication of most public and private entities. Almost 70 percent of Americans get their news from social media platforms. Additionally, if you are a public entity or organization, it provides a source of real-time engagement.

It is important to develop and adopt social media policy and guidelines to ensure social media is used properly at your organization. Outline policies that identify official social media accounts, authorized administrators, guidelines for use, and style guidance. Below is a template to get you started.

POLICY AND GUIDELINE COMPONENTS

Mission of Organization

Mission statement or Organization vision. What is your why or purpose for being?

Social Media Objectives

Why are you using social media and why platforms were chosen – this may include building trust and transparency, building engagement on key issues, informing on construction or issues that affect citizens.

Social Media Platforms/Authorized Accounts

Identify official accounts. If there are accounts that are not official but loosely tied to your organization (such as location Facebook pages that are automatically generated) note those as well.

Administrators and Access

Identify who will be responsible authorized to manage and comment on your organization's platforms. Specify administrator(s) in terms of role in organization, not by person's name. Elected officials are typically not allowed as administrators due potential conflicts such as campaign policies or violation of open

meetings law or other issues. If there are levels of access, such as only being allowed to run analytics, note that here as well. Consider adding a note about the use of consultants. If the City uses communication consultants, they may have a role to address.

Review Process

Consider having varying degrees of review for simple announcements versus projects or special initiatives. Department heads may each provide their own content so as they remain focused on what they know best and reduce review time.

Guidelines for Use

Guidelines for use can be generic in nature to extremely specific policies. As you write guidelines, consider that social media is a fast-moving technology so creating flexible guidelines may suit your organization. Also note that, overall, you want to encourage the use of social media in a positive manner that will support your mission. Being too restrictive or having long, confusing policies will have the opposite effect.

Employees should be prohibited from posting:

- Information about actual or potential claims and litigation involving the government.
- The intellectual property of others, without written permission.
- Defamatory material.
- Any personal, sensitive or confidential information about anyone.
- Obscene, pornographic or other offensive/illegal materials or links.
- Racist, sexist, and other disparaging language about a group of people.
- Sexual comments about, or directed to, anyone.
- Political campaign materials or comments.
- Threatening or harassing comments.
- Other information that is not public in nature, standard format and clearly identifies the user as a city employee.

Style Guide

Your organization inevitable has a brand or culture you want to promote. Make sure that social media administrators or consultants understand the style guide that is appropriate to inform creative posts.

Open Records

Does your organization already fall under open records law? If so, social media will also fall under those existing public records policies. Consider posting all original content (beyond simple congratulatory posts, celebratory events, etc.) on your website and use social media to link back to the document. Use your website as the information repository.

Reporting Violations

Encourage staff and/or elected officials to report any possible or perceived violations or undesirable content or comments to supervisors, managers, or Human Resources. What are the ramifications for violating policy? If there is are corrective steps, be explicit as to what they are.

In general, guidelines should be centered around the following:



Be honest and transparent.



Post only within one's area of expertise.



Post only useful information.



Keep it professional, avoid confrontation.



Be accurate.



Correct errors, and if modifying an earlier post, identify the change.



Be responsive to citizen concerns.



Adopt a user name that follows a standard format and clearly identifies the user as a city employee.

*Suggested from the National League of Cities

SOCIAL MEDIA BEST PRACTICES

Social media, by its very name, is meant for real time interaction. When you only allow information to be pushed out and turnoff comments, this may signal to your citizens that you are not listening, do want feedback or engagement on important City matters. It also may lead to trust issues.

Allow engagement in terms of comments, but not necessarily the ability for other people or 3rd party organizations/groups to post to your page. You do want to remain in control of your brand and message as much as possible so turn off this feature.

Be authentic to your organization and your community culture and brand. Social media allows your organization to truly engage with your citizenry. Use this opportunity to educate and engage in creative ways. Think about how you connect with people in your community and humanize your organization.

Encourage and empower City staff, elected officials, or partner organizations to be ambassadors and influencers in support of your organization messages. Be proactive in communicating and informing these ambassadors of organizations projects and issues so they are prepared.

PERSONAL SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNTS OF CITY STAFF AND ELECTED OFFICIALS

When it comes to your personal social media presence, remember that nothing is truly private. Think twice about rants about a tough day at work, political memes, party photos, and the like. Although your privacy settings may be maximized, savvy internet users can often find content not intended for the general public. For added security, consider changing your settings so that friends can't tag you without your approval to avoid situations out of your control.

Posting about the great things going on in the organization is encouraged, but think about balance and perception when posting about you and the organization accomplishments. Remember to give credit to the team when warranted.



DO say

"So proud of Community X for being recognized by the GFOA for Excellence in Financial Reporting!"



DON'T say

"All my late nights writing that CAFR paid off! Community X was recognized by GFOA for Excellence in Financial Reporting."

DIFFICULT ENGAGEMENT

Because your organization is public entity, free speech is encouraged and protected under second amendment rights. So, how do you mitigate potentially harmful comments, personal attacks, misrepresented or false viewpoints, and the like? The best way is to clearly state your policy to your followers on your page. The City may not be able to remove harmful comments, but as a private business, Facebook can remove harmful comments if they violate their Community Standards guidelines.



Dealing with Difficult Engagement/Trolls

Consider posting the following:

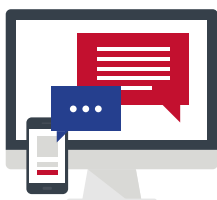
Please keep it clean and kind for all citizens using this page! The (Organization) social media policy follows the same guidelines set forth in the Facebook Community Standards (<https://www.facebook.com/communitystandards/>). If comments from our followers violate these standards, Facebook will be notified.

Other language that your organization may want to consider adding to the About page would be the following:

The (Organization) use of social is provided as a public service. The (Organization) disclaims liability for ads, or other promoted content or comments from third party organizations. The responsibility for external content or comments rests with the organizations or individuals providing them. Any inclusion of external content or comments on social media sites does not imply endorsement by the (Organization)

Other ways to mitigate potentially negative or harmful comments include:

- Anticipating and preparing for announcements that may be controversial. This may include anticipating and preparing FAQs, offering special place for comments on the topic offline, and preparing a staff member to be at the ready.
- Offering to take the discussion offline and into private dialog.
- Lining up the ambassadors and/or experts in advance. Make sure that you have the right voices at the ready to respond. Experts and influencers can lend confidence to the discussion and keep it in the right context.
- Ignoring the trolls. There will be times where followers may make provocative comments in an effort to inflame a situation. Do not engage, but rather use dilution. Meaning, dilute their comments with several other comments.



For more information about social media guidelines and policies or our communications services, please contact:

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