

Social Media Policy Template for the Public Sector

About this template

This template is intended for use as a starting point for public sector organizations drafting a social media policy. The information was compiled from several sources including the Cities of Seattle, WA, and Arlington, TX; and the States of Mississippi, Oklahoma, Texas, and North Carolina. As each public sector organization is different, this template should be modified to fit the needs of your agency.

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[Agency Name]

Social Networking and Social Media Policy

[Version]

**[Creator Name]
[Published Date]**

Internal Policy

Purpose

This document defines the social networking and social media policy for [agency name], the "Agency". To address the fast-changing landscape of the Internet and the way residents communicate and obtain information online, Agency departments may consider using social media tools to reach a broader audience. The Agency encourages the use of social media to further the goals of the Agency and the missions of its departments, where appropriate.

The Agency has an overriding interest and expectation in deciding what is "spoken" on its behalf on social media sites. This policy establishes guidelines for the use of social media.

Acceptable Use

Personal Use

All Agency employees may have personal social networking, Web 2.0 and social media sites. These sites should remain personal in nature and be used to share personal opinions or non-work related information. Following this principle helps ensure a distinction between sharing personal and agency views.

Agency employees must never use their agency e-mail account or password in conjunction with a personal social networking, Web 2.0 or social media site.

The following guidance is for Agency employees who decide to have a personal social media, Web 2.0 or social networking site or who decide to comment on posts about official Agency business:

- State your name and, if relevant, role, when discussing Agency business;
- Use a disclaimer such as: "The postings on this site are my own and don't reflect or represent the opinions of the agency for which I work."

Professional Use

All official agency-related communication through social media, Web 2.0 and social networking outlets should remain professional in nature and should always be conducted in accordance with the Agency's communications policy, practices and expectations. Employees must not use official agency social media, Web 2.0 or social networking sites for political purposes, to conduct private commercial transactions, or to engage in private business activities.

Agency employees should be mindful that inappropriate usage of official agency social media, Web 2.0 and social networking sites can be grounds for disciplinary action. If social media, Web 2.0 and social networking sites are used for official agency business, the entire agency site, regardless of any personal views, is subject to best practices guidelines, and standards.

Only individuals authorized by the Agency may publish content to an agency Web site or state agency social computing technologies.

Approval and Registration

All Agency social media sites shall be (1) approved by [contact]¹; (2) published using approved social networking platform and tools; and (3) administered by the contact or their designee.

Oversight and Enforcement

Employees representing the Agency through social media outlets or participating in social media features on agency websites must maintain a high level of ethical conduct and professional decorum. Failure to do so is grounds for revoking the privilege to participate in agency social media sites, blogs, or other social media features.

Information must be presented following professional standards for good grammar, spelling, brevity, clarity and accuracy, and avoid jargon, obscure terminology, or acronyms.

Agency employees recognize that the content and messages they post on social media websites are public and may be cited as official Agency statements. Social media should not be used to circumvent other agency communication policies, including news media policy requirements.

Agency employees may not publish information on agency social media sites that includes:

- Confidential information
- Copyright violations
- Profanity, racist, sexist, or derogatory content or comments
- Partisan political views
- Commercial endorsements or SPAM

Records Retention

Social media sites contain communications sent to or received by the Agency and its employees, and such communications are therefore public records subject to [applicable public records statute]. These retention requirements apply regardless of the form of the record (for example, digital text, photos, audio, and video). The Department maintaining a site shall preserve records pursuant to a relevant records retention schedule for the required retention period in a format that preserves the integrity of the original record and is easily accessible. Furthermore, retention of social media records shall fulfill the following requirements:

- Social media records are captured in a continuous, automated fashion throughout the day to minimize a potential loss of data due to deletion and/or changes on the social networking site.
- Social media records are maintained in an authentic format (i.e. ideally the native technical format provided by the social network, such as XML or JSON) along with complete metadata.

¹ e.g. IT Department, Public Information Office

- Social media records are archived in a system that preserves the context of communications, including conversation threads and rich media, to ensure completeness and availability of relevant information when records are accessed.
- Social media records are indexed based on specific criteria such as date, content type, and keywords to ensure that records can be quickly located and produced in an appropriate format for distribution (e.g. PDF).
- Each employee who administers one or more social networking sites on behalf of the Agency has self-service, read-only access to search and produce relevant social media records to fulfill public information and legal discovery requests as needed.

Agency utilizes an automated archiving solution provided by ArchiveSocial to comply with applicable public records law and fulfill the above record retention requirements. The Agency archive is available at: <http://archivesocial.com>.

External Policy

The following guidelines must be displayed to users on all social media sites or made available by hyperlink.

Moderation of Third Party Content

All published agency social media content is subject to monitoring. This content may take the form of digital text for Facebook and Twitter, photography images for Instagram, and video for YouTube.²

User-generated posts will be rejected or removed if possible when the content of a post:

- is off-subject or out of context
- contains obscenity or material that appeals to the prurient interest
- contains personal identifying information or sensitive personal information
- contains offensive terms that target protected classes
- is threatening, harassing or discriminatory
- incites or promotes violence or illegal activities
- contains information that reasonably could compromise public safety
- advertises or promotes a commercial product or service, or any entity or individual
- promotes or endorses political campaigns or candidates

Public Records Law

Agency social media sites are subject to applicable public records laws. Any content maintained in a social media format related to agency business, including communication posted by the Agency and communication received from citizens, is a public record. The Department maintaining the site is responsible for responding completely and accurately to any public records request for social media content.

² add additional sites as necessary

About the author of this template

ArchiveSocial enables public entities to safely and effectively utilize social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, and LinkedIn. ArchiveSocial is the industry's first archiving technology providing 100% authentic capture of social media for compliance with state and federal records laws such as FOIA. It provides a legal safety net, and eliminates the time and effort required to respond to public records requests. ArchiveSocial is completely hosted and requires zero IT deployment. It serves as a cost effective offering for any sized public entity, and provides the public sector's easiest and most comprehensive solution for managing records of social media. ArchiveSocial is based in Durham, North Carolina.

Additional papers, articles, and free trial offer available at

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