

## [AGENCY] Social Media Policy [TEMPLATE]

[AGENCY] recognizes the value of using social media to improve customer service; supplement content to official agency website information; solicit and gather feedback; keep customers informed of the latest news and events; educate customers about how to perform certain technical tasks; and recruit and retain staff. Social media is a valuable tool for engaging stakeholders, the public, and staff.

Official agency information and social media posts may only be disseminated through official agency social media platforms (such as Facebook, Twitter, and blogs, for example) and by authorized agency personnel acting in an official capacity for the agency. [AGENCY] employees authorized to conduct social media activities, such as create content, link to other content, follow, repost, or otherwise participate in social media activities, must abide by all agency policies.

All parties must also abide by applicable state and federal laws, such as copyright and defamation laws, as well as the terms of service, terms of use, privacy policies, and other requirements of any communications platforms used.

### **I. Process for Establishing Authorized Agency Social Media Users and Monitoring Agency Social Media**

1. Only staff authorized by the [POSITION, e.g. Communications Director] may use an existing [AGENCY] social media channel. This includes any social media channel (such as a particular [AGENCY] Facebook group or specific blog) that is managed by a [AGENCY] employee as part of their official duties.
2. Divisions may request access to a particular platform or the creation of a specific social media channel to the [POSITION]. The division director should provide information about the service to be used, the intended audience, the type of content to be posted, which employees they recommend to manage the activity, and a plan to ensure the viability of the channel over the long term. The division assumes responsibility to ensure that any new social media channel that is requested is adequately managed and populated with current information. Site management rights are limited and closely monitored.
3. Staff members recommended by division directors to manage such social media activities (and approved by [POSITION]) agree to follow all the guidelines for agency social media activities.
4. [AGENCY] social media sites will make every effort to clearly identify their official status and will incorporate the program or unit's name or acronym whenever possible and will use the appropriate official logo.
5. Some social media sites allow user comments. The [POSITION] will consider carefully whether to allow comments before launching a social media initiative. However, if comments are allowed, user feedback should remain regardless of whether it is favorable or unfavorable to the agency. Comments will be deleted only if they are offensive, abusive, racially inflammatory, threatening or clearly off topic. Comments that endorse a political candidate, party or commercial product will be deleted.

Comments will be considered a public record and retained according to applicable retention policies.

6. The [POSITION(S)] monitor all agency social media activities. If it is deemed that any particular social media channel is lagging in content generation and/or use, they will ask the division to provide a plan to reinvigorate the service or to plan for its elimination.
7. If any social media channel is eliminated, the division director may work with [POSITION/UNIT/DEPARTMENT] to find an alternate and feasible approach for disseminating information.

## **II. Guidelines for [AGENCY] Employees Authorized to Use [AGENCY] Social Media Channels**

The following guidelines should be employed when using public-facing social media services in an official capacity for [AGENCY].

1. Do not discuss any agency related information that is not considered public information. The discussion of sensitive, proprietary, or classified information is strictly prohibited. Staff may not share any information relating to the development or discussions on agency policies. This prohibition applies even in circumstances where password or other privacy controls are implemented.
2. Third-party social media websites should never be the only place in which the public can view critical agency information.
3. When you are representing [AGENCY] in an official capacity, [AGENCY] is responsible for the content you publish on blogs, wikis, social networking websites, or other forms of social media. Assume that any content you post may be considered in the public domain, will be available for a long period of time, and can be published or discussed in the media. If you are unsure about information for posting, check with your division director and [POSITION/UNIT/DEPARTMENT].
4. When reposting or referencing a post on one of the [AGENCY] online sites, provide a link to the original post.
5. Staff should exercise caution that any post or link reflect positively on the agency and not post or link to any materials that could be considered defamatory, harassing, or indecent.
6. Staff should be mindful of functions that allow the organization to follow or be a “fan” of an individual or cause. Consider whether such an action would imply support for a political cause. Any social media affiliations should be based on professional affiliation.
7. Staff must take caution to ensure they do not mistake their personal social media accounts for official agency channels.
8. Follow acceptable social media practices and all applicable guidelines.
9. Do not endorse commercial products, services, or entities.
10. Do not endorse political parties, candidates, or groups.

## **III. Social Media Duties, Assignments, and Back Up**

[AGENCY] employees with assignments to undertake social media responsibilities agree to abide by all requirements, including maintaining current and responsive content as outlined

by their supervisor and [POSITION/UNIT/DIVISION]. The [POSITION/UNIT/DIVISION] will provide training and assistance to all assigned [AGENCY] staff approved for social media duties.

These duties should be included in the employee's job description as part of their portfolio of work activities, and supervisors may prescribe a set amount of time to accomplish division and agency communications goals.

All agency communications forums must be fully accessible by the [POSITION(S)]. While division-specific channels (such as blogs and certain closed Facebook groups) will remain under the content control of the sponsoring unit, the [POSITION(S)] must have login credentials for each forum to ensure continuity and back-up.

#### **IV. [AGENCY] Employees: Personal Use of Social Media and Social Networking**

[AGENCY] employees, or those working on behalf of [AGENCY], who use social media and social networking services and tools for strictly personal use outside of the workplace do not require approval to do so. However, [AGENCY] recognizes that these types of tools can sometimes blur the line between professional and personal lives and interactions. Therefore, employees are reminded that, as representatives of [AGENCY] or their division, agency rules and guidelines must be taken into consideration when participating in these services at any time, but particularly when identifying themselves as employees of [AGENCY] or when the context might lead to that conclusion.

1. When publishing content to any website or through any social media outside of [AGENCY]'s official online presence and the post, link, or content concerns agency operations in any way, staff will be expected to express themselves in a way that reflects positively on the agency and to clearly present their opinions as their own.
2. Staff members are expected to refrain from using or referencing their formal position when writing in a non-official capacity nor to use an agency email address to establish a private social media presence.
3. By virtue of their position, those with leadership responsibilities (e.g., division directors, employees who regularly interact with stakeholders, outreach personnel, etc.) must consider whether the personal thoughts they publish, even in clearly personal venues, may be misunderstood as expressing the position of [AGENCY]. They should assume that those outside our agency will read what is written. Persons self-identifying as a [AGENCY] employee or who have a prominent position in which the person's association with the agency is known to the general public, should take care to ensure that the profile and related content (even if it is of a personal and not an official nature) is consistent with how the person wishes to present him or herself as a professional, appropriate with the public trust.
4. Agency business may not be conducted by personal emails, correspondence, or personal social media activity. Any unsolicited official contact through a personal email or social media account should be forwarded to the recipient's official email account and a

response sent from that account. Employees may, however, use their personal social media accounts to support or promulgate publicly-available information about agency activities and programs.

5. In any publicly accessible social media platform, do not discuss any agency related information that is not already considered public information or approved for public dissemination. The discussion of sensitive, proprietary, or classified information is strictly prohibited.
6. Any activity using government equipment (including access to the Internet) is governed by state and agency rules.

**V. [AGENCY] Employee Standards of Conduct and Relation to Social Media Use**

Employees should remember that standards of ethical behavior are applicable and should adhere to all agency policies, as well as all state and federal laws. Information in any forum must be presented following professional standards for good grammar, spelling, brevity, clarity and accuracy, and avoid jargon, obscure terminology, or acronyms.

False Statements – Agency employees will maintain the highest standard of personal and institutional integrity in all communications. Employees will communicate truthfully and accurately, strive to avoid misunderstandings, and correct errors of fact as they become known.

Misuse of Information in Government Records – Any unauthorized disclosure of a government record or information in a government record that is deemed confidential by law is a violation of public trust and law.

Respect for Others – Employees will, with their conduct and words, show respect for and courtesy to all other employees and the public. Statements or acts that suggest disrespect for other employees or the public are not acceptable. Such unacceptable statements and acts specifically include, but are not limited to, sexual harassment, the use of racial/ethnic slurs, or other stereotyping behavior, speech, or action.

**VI. Laws, Regulations, and Practices to Follow**

All parties using [AGENCY] social media forums must abide by applicable state and federal laws, such as copyright and defamation laws, as well as the terms of service, terms of use, privacy policies, and other requirements of any communications platforms used.

Records Retention. Pursuant to Section 441.158 of the Texas Government Code, the Texas State Library and Archives Commission promulgates records retention schedules for records of state agencies.

Open Records. [AGENCY] social media sites are subject to the Texas Public Information Act (TPIA), found in Chapter 552, Texas Government Code. Content in agency social media, including a list of subscribers and posted communications, is public record.

Respect copyright law. [AGENCY] respects the rights of all copyright holders, and therefore, has adopted and implemented a policy that provides for the removal of material that infringes on the rights of copyright holders. If any work has been copied in a way that constitutes copyright infringement, the aggrieved party should provide information as required by the Online Copyright Infringement Liability Limitation Act of the Digital Millennium Copyright Act, 17 U.S.C. 512 to the Public Information Officer.

Privacy. Only public information is permitted to be posted by [AGENCY] or its designee on [AGENCY] social media websites. If communications that takes place on [AGENCY] social media websites involves or requires private information, communication will be redirected through other appropriate channels. Postings from the public on [AGENCY] social media sites become public record and may be posted on the [AGENCY] website. This information may be subject to public information requests.

Personally Identifiable Information. No personally identifiable information without an individual's permission, unless captured during a public meeting, will be posted on [AGENCY] social media sites by [AGENCY] personnel. [AGENCY] is not responsible for content posted by others to [AGENCY] social media sites. [AGENCY] users that enter personal information on [AGENCY] social media sites do so at their own risk; [AGENCY] is not responsible for the public display of such private information. [AGENCY] may remove postings to its social media sites that contain personally identifiable information, but neither [AGENCY], nor its licensors or contractors, are responsible for any damages caused by delays in such removal.

## **References**

Texas Administrative Code, Title 1, Chapter 206

Texas Administrative Code, Title 1, Chapter 213

Texas Business and Commerce Code, Chapter 521

Texas Government Code, Chapter 441, Subchapter L, 441.180-205

Texas Government Code, Chapter 441.180(11)

Texas Government Code, 441.187

Public Information Act, Government Code, Chapter 552

Copyright Act of 1976 (including the Digital Millennium Copyright Act)

## INFORMATION FOR PUBLIC USERS OF [AGENCY] SOCIAL MEDIA

(Website Notice)

By visiting any social media web property operated by [AGENCY], users agree to abide by the terms set forth below and must abide by applicable state and federal laws, such as copyright and defamation laws, as well as the terms of service, terms of use, privacy policies, and other requirements of any communications platforms used.

A social media web property is defined as: Software or service provided via the Internet used to communicate and share information between people, especially customers or constituents, and where customers, constituents, or the general public share in the creation and development of content.

[AGENCY] is not responsible or liable for content posted by any public user in any forum, message board, or other social media resources, and such user comments do not reflect the opinions and/or position of [AGENCY].

User Participation – Users participate at their own risk. Users are responsible for their comments, photos, username, and another other information provided on [AGENCY]'s social media web properties, including ensuring permission has been granted for submitted content.

Users are expected to uphold the highest standards of ethical behavior and to use [AGENCY] social media forums for constructive communication related to information, library, reading, records management, history, and related information services topics.

Posts and comments are all public and may be viewed by all users.

Users should be careful about posting any private or personally identifiable information, as defined in Texas Business and Commerce Code, Section 21.001 et. seq.

Posts and comments that include sensitive personal information are subject to removal, unless the subject of the information contacts the Public Information Office and grants expressed consent for the disclosure of that information.

Monitoring – All published [AGENCY] social media content is subject to monitoring. This content may take the form of digital text and images. User-generated posts will be rejected or removed if possible when the agency considers the content of a post:

- Used without permission or in violation of copyright or trademark laws (at the time of agency discovery).
- Off-subject or out of context
- Contains obscenity or material that appeals to the prurient interest
- Contains personally identifiable information or sensitive personal information, as defined in Texas Business and Commerce Code, Section 521.001 et. seq.
- Contains offensive terms that target protected classes

- Is threatening, harassing, discriminatory, defamatory or otherwise deemed inappropriate by our agency
- 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, endorses, or contains disparaging language about political campaigns, candidates or office holders
- Contains personal attacks or insulting statements directed toward an individual
- Are of a repetitive or “spamming” in nature (the same comment posted multiple times)

Users who violate these terms of use may be blocked from [AGENCY]’s social media properties.

### **Accessibility**

Every effort will be made for content (such as images, posts, videos and comments) on social media web properties operated by the [AGENCY] to be placed on features that are accessible. However, the agency’s social media properties derive from their party sites, and each third party site applies its own policies to a given social media property. Since accessibility requirements apply to the content contained in the media, and not in the features of the third party site, content posted on third party sites is duplicated on other channels from the [AGENCY]. For people with disabilities, web content and documents in other formats are available on request.

### **Terms of Service**

[AGENCY] social media sites are third party sites and have terms of service and policies that are not governed by [AGENCY] or the State of Texas. These third party sites are not official [AGENCY] websites and the third party’s website terms of service and policies apply.