

City of Austin Policy on Business Usage of Social Media

I. Executive Summary:

This document outlines the policies and procedures for all City departmental and program use of social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube.

II. Purpose:

The purpose of this policy is to provide standards and procedures for the appropriate use of social media that is used in conducting City business. While this generally applies to the most popular sites, such as Facebook, YouTube and Twitter, it is acknowledged that social media is an evolving communications tool and that new resources may become available over time.

Except for posting to a City Social Media Site (defined below), this policy does not apply to use of social media by City employees that occurs on the employee's own time, or to use of social media that is not part of the employee's job. Such personal usage is covered under other applicable personnel policies and standards.

III. Definitions:

- A. "Social Media" are third-party websites which allow for the creation of content and dialogue around a specific issue or area of interest.
- B. "City Social Media Sites" are those pages, sections or posting locations in Social Media websites that are established or maintained by an employee of the City who is authorized to do so as part of the employee's job, and that are used to conduct City business, communicate with officeholders or City staff, and/or communicate with or gather feedback from residents and other interested parties.
- C. "City Social Media Content" is information posted or provided to a City Social Media Site by a City employee (or authorized representative) when such activity is a part of the employee's job duties.

IV. General Governance of City Social Media Sites:

- A. City Social Media Sites may contain information that represents the City's position on policy issues and/or the positions of its leadership, or may create the appearance of representing such positions. For this reason, all City Social Media Sites will be approved by the Chief Communications Director and the Web Content Manager in advance of creating the site. Those wishing to launch new City Social Media sites and/or pages should make their business case to CPIO.
- B. All City Social Media Site login and password information will be shared with the CPIO Web Content Manager and the CPIO Media Relations Manager.

- C. No City Social Media Site will be approved without the designation of a specific departmental representative assigned responsibility for maintenance of the resource.
- D. Employees creating or posting information to a City Social Media Site must conduct themselves at all times as representatives of the City and in accord with all relevant Human Resources policies and administrative bulletins.
- E. Employees found in violation of any part of this policy may be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including termination.
- F. The Chief Communications Director may disable a City Social Media site or prohibit posting of City Social Media Content to a site at any time or for any reason, including without limitation any violation of any part of this policy, unprofessional use of the resource, lack of use or disinterest by the public, or a department's failure to maintain the site.

V. Design and Content of City Social Media Sites:

- A. City Social Media Sites should be focused and limited in scope and topic, and should complement rather than replace the City's existing web resources. General "departmental" pages and associated content should be managed within the current City websites.
- B. Information that is proprietary, attorney-client privileged, subject to state or federal privacy laws, and information not subject to disclosure under the Texas Public Information Act should NOT be posted on a City Social Media Site. Any questions concerning this standard should be directed to the Chief Communications Director.
- C. A clear statement of the intent, purpose and subject matter of the site, as well as a statement clearly articulating that all content and comments posted to the site are subject to public disclosure laws, should be clearly posted on any City Social Media Site.
- D. All City Social Media Sites shall clearly indicate the portion of the Social Media site that is maintained by the City and shall have appropriate City contact information prominently displayed.
- E. Links placed to a City Social Media Site should link to a resource on www.cityofaustin.org, a City-owned Web site, a state, federal or local government site, an educational Web site (.edu) or an organization with an official partnership or supportive business relationship with a City department or program. Exceptions to this rule will be at the discretion of the CPIO, based on the relevance and appropriateness of the request.
- F. Design elements (logos, background, images) should be appropriate to the subject matter and consistent with the City's design guidelines, which are available on the CPIO Intranet site.

VI. Public Comments and Interactive Features:

- A. City Social Media Site accounts must be set up in a way that either maximizes public comments or limits the resource to organizational postings only.

- B. Membership to a City Social Media Site should not be required in order for the public to post comments. If this is not possible, then a City e-mail contact must be posted as an alternative for providing comments.
- C. Interactivity and commenting on sites fall within three distinct categories:
 - 1. "Push" sites which do not allow public comments.
 - 2. "Limited forum" sites that clearly define a specific topic for discussion.
 - 3. "Open forum" sites that do not limit the topic of discussion.
- D. A City department that creates a City Social Media Site that permits interactivity and comments should provide a disclaimer on the site that posted comments do not necessarily reflect the views or position of the City. Editing of public comments posted on an "open forum" by the Department that maintains the site is permitted if the comments:
 - 1. Clearly violate the site's terms of service;
 - 2. Contain information about City business or operations that is confidential and non-public;
 - 3. Would reasonably be considered pornographic, obscene, or defamatory in nature;
 - 4. Directly promote or advocate violence or the threat of violence;
 - 5. Promote or advocate discrimination based on race, creed, color, age, religion, gender, marital status, national origin, physical or mental disability, or sexual orientation;
 - 4. Are solicitations of commerce or promotion of private business enterprises;
 - 5. Contain or link to inappropriate sexual content;
 - 6. Encourage or promote illegal activity;
 - 7. Include information that may compromise the safety or security of the public or public systems; or
 - 8. Appear to violate the legal ownership interest of any other party.
- E. In addition to the above, editing of comments in a "limited forum" is permitted if comments are clearly off-subject, based on the posted scope and topic.
- F. If photos, video, or other media are solicited through a site, all must be accepted and posted unless they fail to meet the guidelines stated above.
- G. All public comments and posted media files inclusive of any edited content must be archived and stored in accord with requirements of Texas and federal laws and City records retention policies.

VII. Centralized Social Media Resources for Twitter and YouTube:

- A. Unless a business case is made and approved for a separate account, City Social Media Content posted on Twitter or YouTube should be coordinated through the City's central resource for these tools.

- B. The City's official Twitter site is [@austintexasgov](https://twitter.com/austintexasgov) (www.twitter.com/austintexasgov). Use of this resource is governed by the following guidelines:
- a. Departments or programs should contact the Corporate Media Relations Manager or Corporate Web Content Manager in the Communications and Public Information Office to coordinate posts to the resource.
 - b. To allow for after-hours use, login and password information for [@austintexasgov](https://twitter.com/austintexasgov) will be shared with the City's public safety PIOs, Austin Energy and Austin Water Utility. Other requests for login access will be considered on a case by case basis.
 - c. A separate account may be approved if there is a limited, defined interest group for the targeted information. If approved, these accounts must be set up to "follow" all other City Twitter resources.
 - d. City of Austin Twitter accounts should only "follow" official governmental or educational Twitter accounts, or accounts owned by an organization with an official partnership or supportive business relationship with a City department or program.
- C. The City is maintaining an official City YouTube channel that will serve as a central repository for City-related videos, programs and PSAs. Use of this resource is governed by the following guidelines:
- e. Departments and programs may request a "playlist" be created to feature their videos. Approval of playlists will be made by CPIO in collaboration with the requesting department.
 - f. The Channel 6 Manager will determine if submitted content is suitable for posting to the channel. Copies of all video content shall be stored and maintained separately by Channel 6 staff for the purposes of records retention.

VIII. Use of Social Media by permanent Boards and Commissions, and other temporary task forces and advisory bodies created by City Council (collectively, Boards) including committees created by such Boards:

- A. The City of Austin recognizes the value that Social Media may offer to the City's Boards, and has developed guidelines for use of these tools in the conduct of work that supports their advisory role to the City Council.
- B. Due to open meetings requirements, individual members of a Board are prohibited from participating in postings or discussion threads on Social Media sites created and maintained by the group that they are a member of.
- C. Any use of Social Media Sites shall not serve as a replacement for postings and notifications required to be posted to City Clerk and/or City of Austin websites.
- D. Boards wishing to initiate Social Media Sites should do so by formal action of the Board, and follow requirements for approval and governance outlined in Section IV of this policy.
- E. Committees of Boards are required to use the main resource established and approved by the "parent" Board.

- F. Boards may utilize Social Media for gathering of public input and fostering of public discussion related to the advisory role they have been assigned by City Council, provided that the use conforms to policies described in Sections IV-VII of this policy, and that they meet the following additional requirements:
 - a. The request for input or posting of discussion items is approved in a formal action of the Board at a posted meeting.
 - b. The request for input or posting of discussion items does not relate to any solicitation that is identified as being in the "No Contact Period" by the City Purchasing Office or Contract and Land Management Department.
- G. "Regular business" is defined as the standard and routine activity of any Board, and generally includes agendas, minutes, presentations documents and backup items created during the course of regular Board proceedings. This may also include responses or clarifications of items of fact related to the Board (dates, times, published data, etc.). Regular business of the Board may be posted to approved Social Media Sites by the appropriate staff liaison without formal action of the Board, provided that posted documents are also available on the City's website. In general, it is preferred that a Board Social Media Site simply provide a link back to information and documents posted on the City website.
- H. Under no circumstance should a Board direct staff to post statements of personal opinion held by individual members.

