

CITY of AUSTIN Administrative Bulletin

Title **City of Austin Social Media Guidelines**

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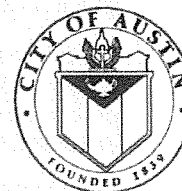
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Prepared by City Manager's Office
Communications & Public Information

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Manager's Approval



PURPOSE

Third-party social media sites have become a valuable resource for sharing of information with the community, and as such should be a component of the City of Austin's overall communications strategy. This administrative bulletin is designed to provide reasonable and flexible guidelines for the use of social media as a communications tool.

POLICY

It is the policy of the City of Austin that any use of social media shall be coordinated through the Communications and Public Information Office, and shall conform to specific standards in terms of content and administration in order to ensure that sites meet appropriate legal and professional standards.

This policy applies to all City of Austin departments, offices and their subdivisions.

DEFINITIONS

Social Media are third-party websites which allow for the creation of content and dialogue around a specific issue or area of interest.

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.

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.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

It is the responsibility of the Department Director to ensure that employees are aware of these guidelines for creating and maintaining social media resources. Carrying out the procedures outlined may be the responsibility of departmental public information staff, Web SPOCS, or another member of staff designated by departmental management.

The Department Records Administrator is responsible for ensuring that all City records created or maintained on City Social Media Sites are retained according to the Department Records Control Schedule and are properly preserved or disposed of.

The executive liaison to each Boards and Commission is responsible for notifying his/her manager of any Board and Commission request for Social Media resources, and to coordinate the activity with the Communication and Public Information Office.

City Employees are responsible for ensuring all contributions to social media sites adhere to the standards of conduct as outlined in this policy.

The Communications and Public Information Office will be the coordinating authority for review, approval, monitoring and governance of any approved City social media sites.

CORRESPONDING PROCEDURES AND POLICIES

All applicable City of Austin policies and administrative bulletins governing employee conduct and communications apply in the administration of this policy. In addition, requirements of the Texas Public Information Act must be met in the administration of City social media sites, as referenced in the policy.

PROCEDURE

I. 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 using the online "Social Media Resource Request" form available on the CPIO Intranet page.
- 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.
- G. Any employee using Social Media Sites, whether as an administrator or as a responder to a posting, will follow these guiding principles:
 - 1. Unless posting or responding as the site administrator, employees should maintain transparency by using his/her given name and job title, and by being clear about his/her role in regards to the subject.
 - 2. Write and post about his/her area of expertise, especially as related to the City and daily assignment(s). When writing about a topic for which an employee is not the City's expert, make this clear to readers.
 - 3. Keep postings factual and accurate. If a mistake is made, admit to it and post a correction as soon as possible.
 - 4. Reply to comments in a timely manner, when a response is appropriate. When disagreeing with others' opinions or providing comments, be sure that the comments are meaningful, respectful and relevant to the topic.
 - 5. Understand that postings are widely accessible, not retractable, and retained or referenced for a long period of time, so consider content carefully.
 - 6. Ensure comments do not violate the city's privacy, confidentiality and applicable legal guidelines for external communication. Never comment on anything related to legal matters, litigation or any parties with whom the City may be in litigation without the appropriate approval.
 - 7. Refrain from the expression of personal opinions or positions regarding policies, programs or practices of other public agencies, political organizations, private companies or non-profit groups.

II. Design and Content of City Social Media Sites:

- A. City Social Media Sites should be 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, copyrighted, 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.austintexas.gov, 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.

III. 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. Are solicitations of commerce or promotion of private business enterprises;
 - 6. Contain or link to inappropriate sexual content;
 - 7. Encourage or promote illegal activity;
 - 8. Include information that may compromise the safety or security of the public or public systems; or
 - 9. 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.

IV. 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:
 - 1. 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.
 - 2. 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.
 - 3. 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.
 - 4. 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 Public Service Announcements (PSAs). Use of this resource is governed by the following guidelines:
 - 1. 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.
 - 2. 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.

V. 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 I 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 I-IV of this policy, and that they meet the following additional requirements:
 - 1. The request for input or posting of discussion items is approved in a formal action of the Board at a posted meeting.
 - 2. 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.

FORMS

City of Austin Social Media Resource Request Form (online only):

<http://cityspace.ci.austin.tx.us/departments/pio/city-of-austin-social-media-resource-request-form>

Texas Public Information Act:

<http://www.statutes.legis.state.tx.us/SOTWDocs/GV/htm/GV.552.htm>