



# **Cole County, Missouri Social Media Policy August 2017**

## **Social Media Policy Working Group**

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# **Cole County, MO Social Media Guidelines**

## **Introduction**

### **Overview**

Web 2.0 and social media are umbrella terms that define the various activities that integrate technology, social interaction, and content creation. Social media use many technologies and forms, such as blogs, wikis, photo and video sharing, podcasts, social networking, mashups, and virtual worlds. Social media is a web/network-based means of creating communities for the purpose of sharing information. Not all forms of social media may be appropriate for use by County departments.

The decision to utilize social media technology is a business decision, not a technology-based decision. It must be made at the appropriate level for each department, considering its mission, objectives, capabilities, and potential benefits. The goal of these guidelines (policy) is not to say “No” to social media websites and block them, but to say “Yes”, with effective and appropriate information assurance, security, and privacy controls. The decision to authorize use of social media websites is a business decision and should be made by Department Head or Elected Official in charge of that department/office.

The purpose of this document is to provide guidelines for use of social media in Cole County, MO government offices. These guidelines will evolve as new technologies and social networking tools emerge.

## **Use of Social Media**

### **Professional Use**

Only authorized personnel may post content to social media pages on behalf of a department. This is to facilitate compliance with public records law and protect information on your personal accounts from public disclosure. You should always consider whether it's appropriate to post an opinion online, commit your department to a course of action, or discuss areas outside of your expertise.

Inappropriate use of social media in violation of these professional and personal guidelines can be grounds for corrective action, including disciplinary action. When posting in an official capacity remember that you are representing Cole County.

Personal accounts should not be used to conduct county business.

Departments should:

- Establish a well-thought-out social media plan that complements countywide policies as well as the department's mission, goals, audience, legal risk, technical/time restraints, security issues, emergency response procedures, etc.

- Decide how much staff time can and should be allotted to creating and maintaining a departments social media.
- Designate a Social Media Coordinator to oversee the department's social media activities. Only authorized department representatives should have permission to post and respond.

## **Personal Use**

Use of your personal social media accounts at work for limited personal communications should be determined by your department head. Department Heads, or designees, are responsible for designating appropriate levels of use.

Do not use a County email address when using social media in personal capacities. For example, don't create a personal Facebook or Twitter account using your colecounty.org email address.

If you identify yourself as a Cole County employee when conducting personal social media activities, consider stating in your profile that your comments are not representative of Cole County government.

An example could be:

*"The views expressed are mine alone and do not necessarily reflect the views of Cole County."*

Whether or not you specify on your personal social media accounts that you work for Cole County, your employment with the County is public record. Be mindful that whenever you discuss issues online, whether in a personal or professional capacity, your comments can be tied back to your employment with Cole County.

Nothing in this document is meant to prevent an employee from exercising his or her right to make a complaint of discrimination or other workplace misconduct, or to express an opinion on a matter of public concern that does not unduly disrupt County operations.

## **Public Records**

It is important to note that content posted using these platforms could be considered public record under Chapters 109 or 610 RSMo depending on content.

**It is the responsibility of the department that owns the media account, not the vendor or Cole County Information Systems department to maintain that record for its retention period.**

If you aren't sure if your information is considered a public record, you can go to <http://www.sos.mo.gov/records/recmgmt/whatisarecord.asp> to find out.

## **Security**

Access to posting on Cole County social media pages should be limited and usernames/passwords should only be known by authorized staff tasked with maintaining the media. In the event an employee with access to those username/passwords leaves Cole County employment, the password should be changed prior to their leaving or if they no longer need it due to changing positions within the County.

Departments should be clear about what information is confidential before posting. If in doubt, the Cole County legal department should be consulted and the post should be approved. If in doubt either don't post, or ask for guidance.

Other social media considerations:

Include at a minimum items such as location, phone number, how to contact, web url, business hours.

If comments are allowed and the social media platform allows you to do so, link to a Comment Policy/Disclaimer.

Example:

*Comments posted to this page will be monitored. Under the Cole County Social Media policy, the County reserves the right to remove inappropriate comments including those that have obscene language or sexual content, threaten or defame any person or organization, violate the legal ownership interest of another party, support or oppose political candidates or ballot propositions, promote illegal activity, promote commercial services or products or are not topically related to the particular posting.*

*Or*

### **Comments Policy**

- *Cole County welcomes dialogue with the public. Comments are subject to public disclosure laws and will be screened for the following:*
- *Potentially libelous comments.*
- *Obscene or explicit comments.*
- *Hateful or mean-spirited comments.*
- *Personal attacks, insults, or threatening language.*
- *Plagiarized material, or material that violates intellectual property rights.*
- *Private, personal information published without consent.*
- *Commercial promotions or spam.*
- *Comments that are off-topic or that link to material that is off-topic.*

- *Comments that embed images from external sources.*

## **Best Practices**

Departments should be able to and regularly back up their Social Media pages. If comments are deleted, a screenshot of the post as well as why it was removed should be archived.

Care should be taken to make sure that if copyrighted material is used the author is credited. Departments should document such material with proof they have permission to use it.

Departments should decide whether or not to enable comments where applicable on social media. They should also have a plan in place for how to handle comments, both positive and negative. Respond quickly to comments so citizens know you are listening.

Photos are a great way to get attention and increase engagement. Think about adding photos that are a peek into everyday workings in County government and images that are simple and send a clear message. It is always a good idea to get permission before posting photos of people.

Videos are another great tool. Three minutes or less is a good time frame.

Post consistently and schedule posts for times when most of your audience will be online.

Keep it simple and to the point. People will not read a lengthy post.

Check your post for spelling and grammar before posting.

*Note: As Social Media platforms evolve this document may be revised from time to time.*

*References:*

State of Utah Social Media Guidelines 4300-0029 -

<http://www.utahta.wikispaces.net/file/view/State%20of%20Utah%20Social%20Media%20Guidelines%209.29.pdf/177053623/State%20of%20Utah%20Social%20Media%20Guidelines%209.29.pdf>

Social Media Records in Missouri - <https://archivesocial.com/social-media-records-missouri/>

<https://s1.sos.mo.gov/CMSImages/RecordsManagement/records/recmgmt/resources/SocialMedia.pdf>

Social Media Handbook: King County, WA - <http://www.kingcounty.gov/about/news/social-media/handbook.aspx>

CivicPlus How to Respond on Social Media.doc - <https://www.civicplus.com/>

The Governments Guide to Using Facebook.pdf - <https://www.govloop.com/pdf-viewer/?file=https://www.govloop.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/The-Governments-Guide-to-Using-Facebook.pdf>