



EXECUTIVE ORDER
POLICY ON USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

EO No.	EO 1-18
Effective Date:	Upon Approval

1. PURPOSE

- 1.1. City of Houston departments may use social media tools such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube to reach a broader audience. While the City's website (www.houstontx.gov) is the City's primary Internet presence, the City recognizes that, when used appropriately, social media may be useful in furthering the goals of the City and the missions of its departments.
- 1.2. This Executive Order provides policies, standards, and procedures for the use of social media sites. All official City presences on social media sites or services are considered extensions of the City's information networks and are governed by the responsibilities set forth in this and related policies and procedures (such as E.O. 1-48, Policy on Information Technology Security and A.P. 8-2, Procedure on Electronic Mail Communications) and in the City's standards of conduct, Chapter 14, Section 14-183 of the City of Houston Code of Ordinances. Violations of this policy shall be considered misconduct and may result in corrective action up to and including indefinite suspension/termination.
- 1.3. Additionally, the City recognizes that many City employees use social media tools such as Facebook in their personal lives. Therefore, this policy provides guidelines for City employees when they communicate on social media sites as a private citizen.

2. OBJECTIVE

- 2.1. To maintain the integrity of the City's presence in social media and to ensure that social media is used appropriately and within City guidelines and policies.

3. DEFINITIONS

City Social Media Sites: Those pages, sections or posting locations in social media websites established or maintained by an employee of the City authorized to do so as part of the employee's job and that are used to communicate with the public on City business..

Social Media: Internet-based technology communications tools with a focus on immediacy, interactivity, user participation, and information sharing. These venues include social networking sites, forums, weblogs (blogs, vlogs, microblogs), online chat sites, and video/photo posting sites or any other such similar output or format. Examples include Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube.

Social media administrators: City employees expressly designated by their department directors to maintain oversight of their department's social media sites. A social media administrator's authority is limited to actions that directly reflect guidance from the social media administrator's departmental director and the policies and procedures of the social media administrator's department and the City.

4. SCOPE

- 4.1. This directive applies to all City employees, including contract employees and volunteers for the City of Houston when working with social media tools on behalf of the City and applies to the extent specified herein with regard to personal social media sites; provided, however, that this executive order does not apply to social media sites of the City's elected officials used solely for campaign or personal purposes.

Approved:

Handwritten signature of Sylvia Turner in black ink.

Date Approved:

10/16/2020

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5. RESPONSIBILITIES

- 5.1. Each department director is responsible for implementing the provisions of this directive and designating a social media administrator.
- 5.2. Each departmental social media administrator is responsible for oversight of the department's social media tools and shall:
 - 5.2.1. Review all requests to establish official City departmental social media sites and recommend approval or denial to the Mayor's Communications Office. Social media administrators shall review social media sites or tools that have already been established in their departments to ensure that they are in compliance with this policy and shall submit a request for approval of such sites in accordance with Subsection 6.4 of this executive order.
 - 5.2.2. Ensure the department's social media sites are regularly maintained and kept current.
 - 5.2.3. Review information posted to the department's social media sites to ensure the content is appropriate, professional, and consistent with the City's policies and the purpose for which the site exists. Frequent review of sites that provide opportunity for comment or other interaction is essential.
 - 5.2.4. Keep the department's director informed of the department's social networking tools and activities.
- 5.3. City employees whose official duties include creating or posting information to a City social media site are responsible for ensuring that such information is accurate, professionally presented, respectful, relevant, and on topic with the department's mission. Care must be taken to ensure that grammar and spelling are correct. Mistakes must be corrected quickly.

6. GENERAL GOVERNANCE AND OVERSIGHT OF CITY SOCIAL MEDIA SITES

- 6.1. City social media sites may contain information that represents or appears to represent the City's position on policy issues or other matters affecting City business and/or the positions of the City's leaders. Thus, the Mayor's Communications Office has general oversight of all City social media sites. In disaster or emergency situations, the Mayor's Communications Office may assume control of departmental social media to ensure that communications are managed appropriately.
- 6.2. Each departmental social media site must be approved by the department's social media administrator. Requests to establish departmental social media sites must contain an explanation of the business necessity for establishing such a site and will be submitted to the department's social media administrator who will review and recommend approval or denial of the request to the Mayor's Communications Office. Requests shall be made in the format found in Appendix A. A department may have more than one social media site upon a showing that multiple sites will accomplish the City's goals in the use of social media.
- 6.3. For social media sites and tools in existence at the time this executive order is promulgated, departmental social media administrators shall submit a request for approval for each of their department's social media sites and tools to the Mayor's Communications Office. Such requests must be submitted within 90 days of the date this Executive Order is promulgated unless an extension is approved in writing by the Mayor's Communications Office.
- 6.4. Persons responsible for setting up or maintaining City social media sites shall provide each administrator's access, login, and password information to the following: their departmental social media administrator, their departmental ITD personnel, the IT Department's Infrastructure Services Security Administrator, and the Mayor's Communications Office. Any changes in administrator access, login or password information must be reported immediately to all such personnel.

6.4.1. Social media administrators and City employees authorized as part of their official duties to post information, make comments, and send messages to the public on their department's Facebook page shall set up a Facebook account to facilitate transparency in communications.

6.4.2. Such Facebook account shall:

6.4.2.1. Contain the administrator's or employee's name.

6.4.2.2. Be created using the administrator or employee's City email address.

6.4.2.3. Be set up so that the page does not allow "wall posts" or "friending" the administrator or employee.

6.4.2.4. Be used solely for City business in connection with their department's Facebook page, and shall not allow comments or "friending" the administrator or employee.

6.4.2.5. Comply with section 7.0 of this directive.

6.5. Employees assigned to maintain City social media sites shall adhere to the principles articulated in this policy. Employees shall not work on departmental social media sites during off-duty hours unless specifically pre-approved to do so in writing on a day-to-day basis by the employee's supervisor. All such time worked outside the employee's normal work scheduled shall be reported and included in the employee's 40-hour work week. Any work in excess of 40 hours will be paid overtime as required by law and City policy.

7. DESIGN AND CONTENT OF SOCIAL MEDIA SITES

7.1. Design elements (logos, background, images) should be appropriate to the subject matter and consistent with the City's design guidelines found at www.houstontx.gov/homepage.html.

7.2. Social media sites must contain a link to both the City website (www.houstontx.gov), and the City departmental website. Each City and departmental website shall contain a clear statement of the purpose and subject matter of social media sites.

7.3. Departments will use proper grammar and where possible, avoid jargon. Social media tools are often more casual than most communication tools but all City social media, such as Facebook and Twitter, shall represent the City appropriately and professionally.

7.4. The following statement shall be included on each departmental website following the City department or program description of the purpose of the social media site or tool:

7.4.1. [Insert name of department or program] is a department [or program] of the City of Houston, www.houstontx.gov. This site is intended to serve as a mechanism for communication between the public and [department/program] on the listed topics. Following or "friending" persons or organizations is not an endorsement by the City and is only intended as a means of communication. All content of this site and all comments submitted to this page and its list of fans are public and are subject to disclosure pursuant to the Texas Public Information Act. Public information requests must be directed to the [department's] public information officer.

7.4.2. Departments may use a departmental logo in their social media tools. Where appropriate for a particular site, social media pages will include the City's logo. Page names should be descriptive of the department/division. City departments will create "pages" in Facebook, rather than "groups." For "type" description, "government" will be used.

7.4.3. Departmental Twitter account biographies will read “[City of Houston, Department name]” and contain a link to the department’s website. Where possible, departmental user names should begin with Houston or HOU (HoustonPolice, HOUPWE, for example). The department’s website shall contain the following statement: “When the City ‘follows’ or ‘friends’ a third party Twitter account, it is only for the purpose of facilitating communications and does not imply City endorsement of any such account.”

7.4.4. All content-sharing activities, such as video-sharing, shall be in good taste, appropriate, and consistent with the City’s policies.

7.5. Comments from the public are allowed on the City’s social media sites and shall be monitored daily to ensure the comments meet certain criteria; the City’s social media sites must be structured narrowly to focus discussions on a particular interest of the City rather than creating a “public forum.” Social media web sites that allow comments must contain the following text on the social media site or must include a link to the location on the departmental website containing the following text:

7.5.1. “Comments. The purpose of this site is to present matters of public interest in the City of Houston, Texas. We encourage you to submit comments, but please note that this is not a public forum.

7.5.2. Comments posted to this page will be monitored. The City reserves the right to delete comments that: contain false information, obscene language or sexual content, threaten or defame any person or organization, support or oppose political candidates, political organizations or ballot propositions, promote illegal activity, commercial services or products, infringe on copyrights or trademarks or are not topically related to the particular posting.”

7.6. Information that is proprietary, subject to the attorney-client privilege or state or federal privacy laws, and information not subject to disclosure under the Texas Public Information Act shall not be posted on any City social media or personal social media site. Each department’s social media administrator shall be responsible for ensuring compliance with this rule.

8. SECURITY AND PRIVACY

8.1. Applications (such as streaming video, music, photos, subscriptions to RSS feeds) that may be useful to a City social media site’s mission can cause clutter and security risks. An application should only be used to serve a City purpose and add to the user experience, and only if it comes from a trusted source and has gone through the approval process outlined in Section 6 of this Executive Order. An application may be removed at any time if it causes a security breach or contains a virus.

8.2. Social media sites are hosted by third parties and are governed by such parties’ privacy policies. Additionally, the City’s social media sites are governed by the City’s privacy policy, www.houstontx.gov/privacy.html.

9. RECORDS RETENTION AND PUBLIC INFORMATION

9.1. 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 local governments. Each City department has a schedule and policy for retention of its records. The retention period for a record depends on the content of that record, regardless of the medium in which it is maintained. Departments maintaining a City social media site or using social media tools shall preserve records on a City server for the required retention period in a format that preserves the integrity of the original record and is easily accessible. Further, departments will destroy, transfer, or otherwise dispose of records in accordance with records disposition schedules.

9.2. Open Records. City of Houston social media sites are subject to the Texas Public Information Act

(TPIA), found in Ch. 552, Texas Government Code. Content in City social media, including a list of subscribers and posted communications, is public record. The department maintaining the site is responsible for responding completely and accurately to any public information requests for information on social media. Content shall be maintained in an accessible format so that it can be produced in response to a request. Difficulty in accessing the information does not excuse compliance with the TPIA. Users of City social media sites shall be notified that public information requests must be directed to the relevant departmental public information officer.

10. APPROPRIATE EMPLOYEE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

- 10.1. All City of Houston ordinances, executive orders, administrative procedures, or other policies that might apply to social media use (whether personal social media or City social media) remain in full force and effect. Employees should always adhere to them, when applicable, when using social media (whether personal social media or the City social media).
- 10.2. Consistent with the City's policies on use of the City's telephone and email systems, incidental and occasional personal use of social media is permitted during work hours provided it is very limited in duration and does not have a detrimental effect on employee productivity.
- 10.3. City resources, work time, social media tools, and a City employee's official position shall not be used for personal profit or business interests or to participate in political activity. For example, a building inspector may not use the City's logo (or its likeness), email, or work time to promote a side business as a plumber.
- 10.4. Personal or business venture social media account names shall not be tied to the City. For example, CityofHoustonCop would not be an appropriate personal account name.
- 10.5. If commenting on City business, employees should use a disclaimer which establishes that their comments represent their own opinions and do not represent those of the City of Houston.
- 10.6. Employees may not attribute personal statements or opinions to the City when engaging in private blogging or postings on social media sites.
- 10.7. Employees, City contract employees, and City volunteers shall not use their City email account or password in conjunction with a personal social networking site.
- 10.8. City employees, contract employees for the City, and City volunteers shall not post images, files, or text depicting City property, equipment, or personnel in any manner that would adversely affect the reputation of the City or a City department.
- 10.9. The following guidelines apply to personal communications using various forms of social media (including without limitation personal social media, private blogging, business venture social media, and personal social networking sites):
 - 10.9.1. Use common sense when using social media sites. Remember that what you write is public, may be public for a long time, and may spread to large audiences. Refrain from posting information that you would not want your supervisor or other employees to read or that you would be embarrassed to see in the newspaper or on television.
 - 10.9.2. Whether on or off duty, the City expects its employees to be truthful, courteous, and respectful toward supervisors, co-workers, citizens, customers, and other persons associated with the City. Employees shall not engage in name-calling or personal attacks or other such demeaning behavior.
 - 10.9.3. Except as otherwise allowed by law, employees, whether on duty or off duty, shall not utilize social media to communicate (e.g. verbally, non-verbally, or in writing), depict, or use any hate

speech, slurs, connotations, caricatures, or references that derogate, ridicule, degrade, malign, or disparage another's protected class, including but not limited to race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, sex, gender, sexual orientation, or sexual identity, where such conduct satisfies one or more of the following three criteria: it would (1) adversely affect the employee's job performance, work, job duties or ability to function in the employee's position; (2) adversely affect the City's (including the department's) ability to fulfill its mission or to serve the public; or (3) create a hostile work environment.

10.9.4. Each situation will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. Employees are encouraged to discuss this Executive Order with their supervisor, who may escalate the matter to appropriate City personnel, as part of discussing the matter with the employee.

11. Use OF SOCIAL MEDIA BY BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS

11.1. Boards or commissions that wish to initiate the use of official social media sites should do so by formal action of the board or commission and must follow requirements for approval and governance outlined in this policy.

11.2. Under the Texas Open Meetings Act, individual members of a board or commission covered by such Act are prohibited from participating in postings or discussion threads on social media sites created and maintained by the board or commission of which they are a member.

12. CONFLICT AND REPEAL

12.1. This Executive Order supersedes Executive Order 1-18, effective January 4, 2011, which shall be of no further force or effect. In the event of a conflict between this Executive Order and any federal or state constitutional provision, law, statute, or regulation, the federal or state constitutional provision, law, statute or regulation supersedes this Executive Order.

13. ATTACHMENT

Appendix A - Application for Approval of Social Media Site/Tool