

# **Winnebago County**

## **Social Media Policy**

*Effective September 1, 2022*

### **Introduction**

To address the fast-changing landscape of the Internet and the way residents communicate and obtain information online, Winnebago County Departments may consider participating in social media formats to reach a broader audience. Winnebago County encourages the use of social media outlets to further the goals of the County and the missions of its Departments where appropriate. This Policy provides standards and guidance to county departments and personnel regarding the use of social media platforms for county business.

### **Policy**

#### **1. Purpose.**

- 1.1** Winnebago County (the “County”) has an overriding interest and expectation in deciding what is “announced” or “spoken” on behalf of the County through the use of social media. This policy establishes guidelines for the establishment and use of social media by the County for conveying information about the County and its events and activities. This policy also establishes guidance for employees acting in a personal capacity when using social media.

The County’s intent is to create a “government speech forum” or a “limited forum” devoted exclusively to the County’s postings to the public. Nothing in this policy shall be applied to prohibit or infringe upon any communication, speech or expression that is protected or privileged under law. This includes speech and expression protected under state or federal constitutions as well as labor laws or other applicable laws.

#### **2. The County's Website.**

- 2.1** The County’s website ([www.winnebagocountywi.gov](http://www.winnebagocountywi.gov)) is the County’s primary and predominant internet presence. All of the County’s website content and social media sites that are posted by departments and offices will be subject to approval by the Department Head or designee. Social media use should complement rather than replace the County’s primary website. Only employees authorized by the Department Head are authorized to post content on the County’s website.

#### **3. Scope.**

- 3.1** This policy and procedure applies to all departments and County Workforce Members of Winnebago County contributing to websites, blogs, Wikis, social networks, virtual worlds, or any other kind of social media both on and off County websites.

#### 4. Definitions.

- 4.1** Social Media. Refers to content created by individuals with the use of various technologies for the purpose of information sharing through the Internet. Examples of social media are Blogs, Discussion Forums, Social Networking websites, Photo-sharing websites, Video-sharing websites, Wikis, and more.
- 4.2** Accounts:
- 4.2.1** Employee Account. This is a workforce member user account created and managed by Winnebago County. It is in the format: @winnebagocountywi.gov. It is also the workforce members official email address.
  - 4.2.2** External County Account. This is an account with an external server or service, such as a Gmail email account associated with and required to perform an official county function.
  - 4.2.3** Personal Account. This is an account that is external of Winnebago County, independent of employment with Winnebago County. It is not an official account.
  - 4.2.4** Shared Account. This is an account that includes shared access to various workforce members.
- 4.3** County Workforce Members. Includes, but is not limited to, employees, contractors, consultants, volunteers, 3rd party affiliates, or any entity doing work on the behalf of Winnebago County or using information systems owned, operated, or leased by Winnebago County.
- 4.4** Blog (short for web log). A type of website with regular diary style entries commonly displayed in reverse-chronological order. Entries usually contain commentary, descriptions of events, or other material such as graphics or video. Blog readers usually have the ability to leave comments.
- 4.5** Discussion Forum. An online discussion site where individuals can discuss topics by leaving messages and receiving responses. Many topics on forums can include questions, comparisons, polls of opinion, and debates.
- 4.6** Social Networking Websites. Focuses on the building of social networks or social relations among people. Social networking sites allow users to interact, share ideas, activities, events, and interests with people within their individual networks. Examples include Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, LinkedIn, etc.
- 4.7** Instant Messaging. Any tool used for text communications between county workforce members and/or the public. Examples include, but are not limited to, Microsoft Skype, Facebook Messenger, and Microsoft TEAMS.
- 4.8** RSS. Short for Really Simple Syndication. Allows subscribers to receive content from blogs and other social media sites and have it delivered

through a feed.

- 4.9 Podcasts. Audio or video content that can be downloaded automatically through a subscription to a website so you can view or listen offline.
- 4.10 Wiki. A website that allows the easy creation and editing of a number of interlinked web pages. They are often used to create collaborative websites, to power community websites, for personal note taking, and in corporate intranets.
- 4.11 Website. Servers, software and services necessary to present content (pages) to people using an internet web browser. Some websites are categorized as county managed or not county managed.
- 4.12 Public Event: A non-program specific event open to the general public which would include public meetings.

## 5. **Social Media Posting.**

As a public entity, the County must abide by certain standards to serve all constituents in a civil and unbiased manner. Only the County Communication Team is authorized to administer and manage posts to the Winnebago County, WI Government official page. Only employees authorized by the Department Head may post content on their respective official County Department social media profile. The Information Technology Department will maintain a list of social media profiles approved for use by departments. Each Department using social media platforms shall maintain a list of authorized employees responsible for communicating the County's business on their Department's page. Any social media profiles used by the County are the property of the County and not the property of an employee or other party. Authorized employees will inform the Information Technology Department of any administrative changes to existing social media profiles.

- 5.1 For each social media profile approved for use by the County, the Department shall establish a list of authorized employees who may manage the social media profile.
- 5.2 Authorized employees representing the County on social media must conduct themselves at all times as professional and dignified representatives of the County and in accordance with all policies, directives, and professional expectations.
- 5.3 Employees posting content on behalf of the County must follow these guiding principles:
  - 5.3.1 Communications must be consistent with the goals, branding, mission, vision, and values of the County.
  - 5.3.2 Communications must be factual and accurate and not reflect opinions or biases.
  - 5.3.3 Communicate meaningful, respectful entries that are on topic while also recognizing that postings are widely accessible and not easily retractable.

- 5.3.4 Communications must be written in plain business English with proper grammar and vocabulary, and should avoid acronyms and jargon.
- 5.3.5 Communications must comply with policy, directives, professional expectations, and respect for privacy, confidentiality, and applicable legal guidelines for external communication.
- 5.3.6 Ensure that legal right exists to publish all materials, including photos and articles, and comply with all trademark, copyright, fair use, disclosure of processes and methodologies, confidentiality, and financial disclosure laws.
- 5.3.7 If identifying yourself, then maintain transparency by using your real name and job title, and by being clear about your role regarding the subject. Write and post only about your area of expertise. Remember that your postings are your responsibility.
- 5.3.8 Communications must never be for political purposes or in support of or opposition to political campaigns or ballot measures.
- 5.3.9 Communications must never be for purposes of private business activity or commerce, or for personal motivation or sharing of personal opinion or commentary.
- 5.3.10 Communications must not promote, foster, or perpetuate discrimination, harassment, or retaliation on the basis of race, creed, color, age, religion, gender, marital status, national origin, disability, or sexual orientation, or other protected status.
- 5.3.11 Communications must not compromise the safety or security of the public, public systems, or public services.
- 5.3.12 Communications must protect the privacy of clients and others in the County. Personally, identifiable information such as social security numbers, phone numbers, addresses, or email addresses shall not be included in communications. You must also protect the privacy of any sensitive and confidential information the County holds.
- 5.3.13 If posting a picture or video of an adult, or minor child, the individual, or parent/legal guardian must consent to the use of their image on the social media site, unless the picture or video was taken at a public event.

5.4 Appropriate time spent on updating social media sites should be discussed between the employee and supervisor, and should not interfere with completion of other job duties. Time spent updating social media outside of normal work hours must be approved by the employee's Department Head or supervisor.

5.5 The general position of the County is to use social media that promotes one-way communication from the County to the public. Social media platforms are reserved for government speech to allow County officials and Departments to post notices and information. As such, "commenting," "liking," or "non-liking" of a **post or comment** by authorized employees on behalf of the County is not permitted except in the following limited circumstances, the employee's name and title should be made available in the responsive comment:

- 5.5.1 An employee may respond to a comment when the employee is

providing contact information to the commenter to seek or provide further information.

**5.5.2** An employee may respond to a comment or post to direct the poster to the County's website or to a previous social media post by the County.

**5.5.3** An employee may respond to a comment to provide a guidance or a technical answer to a question.

**5.6** If a comment or post demonstrates or incites unlawful behavior, the authorized employee may notify law enforcement authorities.

**5.7** A post, like, or comment by a member of the public on any County social media profile is the opinion of the commentator or poster only. Publication of a user's post, a like, or a comment does not imply endorsement of, or agreement by, the County or reflect the opinions or policies of the County. The County assumes no liability for any comment, like, or post made by another person.

**5.8** The County should not deny access to the County's social media profile for any individual who violates the County's social media policy. The social media provider may, relying their terms and conditions and their discretion, block a user or remove content in violation of the terms and conditions, and nothing herein restrains the social media provider from such actions.

**5.9** The nature of social networking promotes a great deal of interactivity, whereby users or organizations "like" or "follow" each other online. Official County social media sites may "like" or "follow" the **social media sites** of local, state, and federal government organizations, generally recognized community and/or not-for-profit organizations, and organizations that provide public safety, promote tourism, industry, and economic welfare within the community, and businesses located within Winnebago County.

**5.10** It is the responsibility of the department to establish, publish, and update their pages on social media websites. It is the responsibility of the department to ensure that information is accurate and up-to-date. Inactive or unused social media sites may be terminated or merged by the County Communication Team and the Department Head responsible for the account. Coordination to provide record retention back-ups by the Information Technology Department must be completed prior to termination or merging.

## **6. Record Retention.**

**6.1** The County must retain all social media content published by the County for the purposes of public records retention as may be required by applicable law. Records required to be maintained pursuant to a relevant records retention schedule for the required retention period in a format that preserves the integrity of the record and is accessible. Any content removed by the County based on these guidelines must be retained in accordance with the applicable retention schedule including the time, date and identity of the poster, when available. The Information Technology Department will retain appropriate public records. Any Department wishing to establish a new social media site, must notify Information Technology prior to establishment.

**7. Open Meetings Law Compliance.**

**7.1** All conduct by officials serving on a governmental body must comply with Wisconsin's Open Meetings Law. Officials should refrain from discussing business or action of the governmental body with one another while using social media. Authorized employees publishing on the County's social media profile should not engage officials serving on a governmental body when engaging in the County's social media activity.

**8. Personal Use of Social Media.**

**8.1** Like other members of the community, employees may use social media profiles not belonging to the County for the employee's personal social media purposes. The County values employees' First Amendment right to communicate on their personal social media accounts; however, it is important that employees are aware that there are limitations to this right. It is also important employees are aware that most uses of personal social media are still part of the public domain regardless of privacy settings, as content posted to the internet is easily replicated and published despite attempted privacy measures an employee might otherwise undertake.

**8.2** An employee's personal social media profile or use must remain personal in nature and not be used to share the County's official government positions or views. In addition, employees are prohibited from using their County e-mail account, login, or passwords in conjunction with a personal social media profile. Regardless of whether an employee identifies on a personal social media account that the employee works for the County, employment with the County is public record and members of the public may associate the employee with the County. As a result, members of the public may associate an employee's speech on a private social media page as attributable to the County. For these reasons, employees must exercise care when posting and commenting on social media, as personal views can be tied back to employment with County.

**8.3** Employees posting personal content on social media must follow these guiding principles:

**8.3.1** When commenting or posting on matters pertaining to the County, the employee must make clear to other persons that the employee is speaking as a private citizen and not as an employee of the County.

**8.3.2** Personal activity must comport with the County's policies, directives and expectations.

**8.3.3** Personal activity is the personal responsibility of the employee, including the consequences that flow from such activity.

**8.4** Nothing in this policy is meant to prevent an employee from exercising his or her right to make a complaint of unlawful discrimination or other workplace misconduct through the proper processes, to engage in lawful protected concerted activity, or to express a personal opinion on a matter of public concern which may be balanced against the interests of the County.

**9. Winnebago County Social Media Policy (for posting on social media sites).**

- 9.1** The following Policy Statement shall be displayed on all County social media pages:

*The purpose of this site is to present matters of public interest to Winnebago County residents, businesses, visitors and other interested parties. A comment posted by the member of the public on any Winnebago County social media site is the opinion of the commenter only and publication of a public comment does not imply endorsement, nor reflect the opinions or policies of, Winnebago County.*

*This forum is NOT monitored at all times but is primarily monitored during business hours.*

*Do NOT use this forum to report emergency situations or time-sensitive issues.*

*All content of this page including comments is subject to public records law. When posting, please remember that if your comment or post demonstrates or incites unlawful behavior, it may be referred to law enforcement authorities. The social media provider may, relying on their terms and conditions and their discretion, block a user or remove content in violation of the terms and conditions.*

**10. Violations of this Policy.**

- 10.1** Social media administrators may face disciplinary action up to and including termination for using social media in a manner that violates County policies. Information posted on social media sites can be used by the County as evidence in disciplinary actions. Public social media content may be subject to legal discovery including subpoenas in legal proceedings.

**CERTIFICATION**

I have read and understand the Winnebago County Social Media Policy and I agree to abide by these policies.

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Printed Name

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Signature

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Date