



GUIDELINES, BEST PRACTICES AND POLICY FOR
SOCIAL MEDIA USE FOR THE CITY OF SEABROOK, TX

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1. Introduction

These guidelines and policies are intended to assist city employees who will use social media as a communication tool to encourage social media use between the City, and its citizens and businesses. Given the evolving nature of social media, this document will be reviewed and updated periodically as technologies or law evolve.

Attribution

These guidelines were developed based on the shared experiences and specimens from other cities and organizations; in particular, the Social Media Policy of the Seabrook Economic Development Corporation.

2. Purpose

Social media offers City of Seabrook employees the opportunity to interact with the public in new, exciting ways that facilitate transparency, interactivity and collaboration. These tools engage audiences differently than traditional media and enhance communication strategies.

The City of Seabrook encourages the use of social media to advance the goals of the city and the missions of its departments, where appropriate.

The purpose of this guideline/policy is to assist the employees of the City of Seabrook on how to effectively and responsibly navigate issues unique to social media. This includes the management and development of social media tools, content, restrictions and limitations.

The definition of social media is web-based applications that facilitate information sharing and collaboration such as web-based communities, social networking sites, video-sharing sites, wikis, blogs and others.

City staff or authorized employees responsible for developing, maintaining, and monitoring social media applications shall be designated by the City Manager. The City Manager shall be the final authority on content published to social media applications.

3. Applicability

These guidelines and policies are applicable to all City of Seabrook employees, elected and appointed officers, officials, and to all members of City boards and commissions who utilize any social media directly or indirectly on behalf of the City. This policy also applies to all City of Seabrook personnel who personally utilize any social media or other Internet activity that may impact the City's credibility, reputation, employee morale, services or goals of the City of Seabrook.

These guidelines apply without regard to whether the use of social media occurs during working or non-working time, or on duty or off duty use. Similarly, the policy applies regardless whether city equipment or city time is used.

4. Acceptable Uses and Restrictions

The best and most appropriate uses of social media for the City of Seabrook generally fall into two categories:

- As a channel for disseminating time-sensitive information as quickly as possible.
- As a mechanism for communication between the City of Seabrook and members of the public, and more directly, its residents and businesses.

City staff representing the City of Seabrook on City social media sites and applications in the course of their assigned duties and responsibilities are bound by existing city policies and standards, including but not limited to:

- Applicable state, federal and local laws, regulations, ordinances, charter provisions and City policies, (E.g. Title VII, nondiscrimination, harassment, etc.)
- All information and technology security guidelines, procedures and policies.
- Existing City standards of conduct, ethics, rules and policies
- The Texas Public Information Act and e-discovery laws and policies (requiring content to be managed, stored and retrieved and open to public inspection and disclosure).
- Applicable state records-retention laws and City schedules for retention.

Personal Responsibility

All city employees must be cognizant that how they present themselves on social media applications reflects on the City whether with respect to city social media sites or personal ones. Public and private or personal and professional avenues of communication may easily become blurred and result in inappropriate use or content.

In all applications, the following shall apply:

Confidentiality

Employees will not post or use proprietary, confidential, sensitive or individually identifiable information or divulge city intellectual property (trademarks, copyrights, or patents) in any social media applications.

Disclaimers

If employees refer to or identify themselves as city employees on social media applications, use of a disclaimer is mandatory. (e.g. "While I work for the City of Seabrook, anything I publish is my personal opinion and not the opinion or position of the City of Seabrook, or a reflection of the City's policies).

Personal vs. Professional Use

Employees' personal social media sites should remain personal in nature and should not be comingled or used for work-related purposes or to conduct official City business.

Employees should not use their city e-mail account or password when accessing personal social media accounts. Personal and City social media accounts should not be synchronized for dual access or reference purposes.

Use of City Resources

Employees may use city-owned assets and equipment or resources (computers and cell phones) to access social media sites (personal or City sites) on a limited basis. Department directors will determine the level of access assigned to authorized users and the limits of non-business use in their respective departments.

Ethical Obligations

City ethical rules must be followed at all times, even when employees engage in social media use in their personal capacities.

Professional Responsibility

All city-related communication through social media applications should remain professional in nature and should be conducted in accordance with the city's communications policy, practices and expectations. Employees are expected to use good judgment and take personal and professional responsibility for any content they publish via social media.

All employees who use social media applications must:

Authorization

Not access social media sites or other online forums on behalf of the City unless authorized by appropriate city management.

Identify Yourself Clearly

When creating or using social media accounts that require individual identification, authorized users speaking on behalf of the city should identify themselves, if possible, by: 1) full name; 2) title; 3) department; and 4) contact information, when posing or exchanging information on social media forums. Unauthorized use of an authorized

employee's identification or access credentials/information is a violation of this policy and will be disciplined accordingly.

No Privacy Expectation

Employees should have no expectation of privacy as to information stored on city computers, networks, databases or devices. Furthermore, there should be no expectation of privacy regarding any communications between any City employee and the public when the employee is in course and scope of performing his/her assigned duties

Authorized Use

Only authorized City employees may moderate City developed social media applications and sites on behalf of the city. Authorized employees must support the City's missions and goals in doing so.

Communication Quality

Authorized employees should use good judgment and accuracy in all City social media communications. Errors and omissions reflect poorly on the City of Seabrook and may result in liability for the City. In addition to the Professional Responsibilities listed above, authorized city staff should refrain from any social media activity that is inconsistent with, or that reasonably could be expected to negatively impact the City of Seabrook's reputation or standing in the community. Employees are cautioned to be respectful and professional to everyone, including fellow personnel, organizations, residents, and businesses.

When drafting a communication, make sure that it:

- Has a clear purpose
- Speaks well to the reader
- Is clear and concise without unnecessary verbiage
- Provides value to the reader
- Uses proper spelling, grammar, syntax and punctuation
- Is positive and informative
- Offers links, pictures or references opportunities for more information, where reasonable
- Has benefit to both the city and public

In addition to the suggestions above, best practices on how to be a good citizen of the social media environment include:

Be responsible

All statements made about the City in any social media site, whether personal, private or official, reflect upon the City, its employees, services and elected City officials. Each employee will be held accountable for all posts made officially in City media sites or personally on City media sites or in personal social sites. Once published, a communication can never be totally eliminated from the web, even if withdrawn. Defamatory or disparaging statements about the City, its agents, employees or services made on personal or private social media sites are no less a reflection on the City and serve as a basis for lack of accountability against any employee who violates these guidelines.

Be honest and transparent

Dishonesty, deceit, and untruthfulness are quickly noted in the social media environment and have a deleterious effect on the City. Therefore, all representations made on City media sites must be clear, accurate, complete, thorough and truthful.

Correct errors quickly

Any mistakes should be admitted as directly as feasible. Omissions, misleading entries or misrepresentations must be corrected as soon as they are recognized or brought to the City's attention. Correct information will be quickly provided with appropriate modifications and disclaimers, if necessary or helpful to clear up any misunderstanding or confusion.

Be respectful of the reader and the audience

Social media publications should only be made when the City and/or the public would benefit by the publication. Value must be added. Communications from the City should assist the public and build a co-beneficial relationship and rapport with the City and its agents. This could include, among other things, thought provoking articles that build a sense of community, improve knowledge or skills, enhance business development, enable problem solving, increase awareness of city sources and resources and encourage mutually beneficial platforms for employees to provide better, more efficient city services.

Stay within your area of expertise or authority

All information posted on City sites must be authorized and appropriate. Employees should only publish information within their own area of expertise and not speculate, guess or assert personal opinion or commentary unless approval is authorized by appropriate city management.

Respect proprietary information, content, privacy and confidentiality

For any non-original work, proper credit must be attributed. No copyrights, trademarks, trade secrets or other proprietary matter may be published without prior written

approval, licenses obtained, permits and fees paid and/or proper attribution made within the publication itself. Links may be referenced to others' work rather than reproducing it on the City site. Employees' or city officials' names and/or likenesses may be used only with permission from such person to post on the site. All publications that include City intellectual property of any kind must be safeguarded with appropriate disclaimers and notices to prohibit the unauthorized use or performance of such proprietary matters.

Respond quickly

All communications requiring a reply or response shall be made in a timely manner in accordance with these guidelines.

Be sociable, courteous and respectful

In all communications, employees should use plain language and avoid using government jargon or acronyms. Use content that is open-ended and invites a response, or encourages comments. Responses should always be polite and respectful, even if the original response is not. When shortening words to maximize communication, utilize commonly used shorthand terms, letters and symbols.

Abide by social media rules

Employees utilizing social media sites shall abide by the site's terms of service or terms of use. Before utilizing the site, each employee shall become acquainted with each site's terms and conditions of use or rules for services and follow them as directed. No employee is authorized to abuse a social media site and shall be accountable for any abuse, misuse or violations of such terms or rules of engagement.

Prioritize your participation

Authorized employees shall use social media sites only as approved and should not linger longer than necessary. Duration of use shall be commensurate with job duties and responsibilities and only as long as necessary to complete City business.

Restrictions and Prohibitions

Users and visitors to the City of Seabrook social media sites will be notified that the intended purpose of the site is to serve as a mechanism for communication between the City of Seabrook and the public. Although free speech and cross - communication is encouraged, there are certain topics and issues that are NOT allowed on City of Seabrook social media sites comments, links and uploads. By way of example, these include, but are not limited to:

- Comments in support of or opposition to political campaigns or ballot measures.
- Profane language or content. Abusive or disparaging comments directed at individual(s).

- Content that promotes, fosters, or perpetuates discrimination on the basis of race, creed, color, age, religion, gender, marital status or lack thereof, socio-economic status of individual(s), national origin, physical or mental disability or sexual orientation
- Sexual expression, discrimination, harassment or content of any kind or links to sexual content or pornography whether of an adult, minor or child.
- Any expression of conduct or encouragement of illegal activity
- Information that may tend to compromise the safety or security of the public or the City's public safety systems
- Any expression of words that would disparage right, title or interest of a legal ownership of any other individual or business.
- Comments that do not pertain to the topic under discussion; including comments containing links to other websites or pages which are not relevant to the topic under discussion
- References to or inappropriate characterizations of individuals including personal attacks upon any member of the public, City employee or City official.
- Advertising or promotional announcements of private or commercial enterprises, even if not for profit unless the City is co-sponsoring such activity or event. Only City business related advertising (services) or promotional announcements (special events) are allowed.
- Individually identifiable information (e.g. address, phone number and social security numbers) of specific individuals be they City employees, officials or members of the public.

The City of Seabrook reserves the right to restrict or refuse to re-publish any content that is deemed in violation of these guidelines or any applicable federal, state or local law(s), including the terms of service or terms of use outlined by third-party social media application providers. The City of Seabrook reserves the right to block users who violate these terms.

Monitoring

Social media is an engaging medium and welcomes two-way and cross conversations, giving the City of Seabrook the opportunity receive and obtain comments and feedback from users regarding how the City is perceived, what it is doing right and what users think might be wrong or done more effectively or efficiently.

Monitors enforce this policy and guidelines to ensure content and posted comments are suitable for all readers, while respecting the gamut of opinions and points of view.

Prohibited, negative and/or inappropriate comments from users are to be expected given the deeply felt passion some individuals express about topics close to their hearts. Unacceptable

forms of communication should not become a worrisome issue or treated as a sign of failure in social media strategies and usages. Instead, such comments can be reformed into positive effects, indicating to the online community that the city is professional, engaged in a dialogue with its users and that it values their.

Typical scenarios with suggested outcomes – a guide

Identify the Type of Feedback

The first step in dealing with negative feedback is determining what type of comment has been received. Negative feedback comes in a few different forms, each of which is best dealt with by a different type of response.

Constructive Criticism

Many users will use social media to suggest ways in which the City can improve upon services. While this type of feedback may point out flaws or issues, it can be extremely helpful to receive.

Merited Condemnation

Essentially, the City of Seabrook or one of its agents did something wrong, and someone is unhappy. Again, while this type of feedback is not positive, it can serve as a means to convey information regarding solutions being worked, results achieved and ways that issues have been resolved.

Trolling/Spam

Trolls and spammers will use a negative comment about the City, a political figure or provided service (whether true or false) to promote a competing entity, person or service.

Determine Best Approaches for Response

When responding to criticism, even the negative type, it is important to stay positive. Adding more negativity to the conversation or being drawn into a fight with a customer or user will likely reflect poorly on the organization.

Constructive Criticism

A response is almost certainly necessary. Regardless, if a real problem exists, steps should be taken to remedy the issue, therefore it is important communication occurs between the social media moderator and department handling the problem. Sometimes, this type of feedback is the result of a perceived problem rather than an actual problem (e.g. someone who doesn't like the method by which something was done). This type of complaint should be given a response, if only to say, "Thank

you for bringing it to our attention, but here is why we have this procedure in place."

There will be times when the organization will not want to implement the suggestion given, however, trust will be built by responding to criticism with a positive message.

Merited Condemnation

This can be tougher to deal with, because comments are more likely to feel personal. It is important to keep in mind that this type of feedback, as harsh as it may be, has a basis in a real problem. It is best to respond promptly and with a positive tone (e.g. thank the user for the feedback and assure them that steps are being taken to correct the issue or mitigate their problem).

Trolling/Spam

This is the only category of negative feedback that does not require a response. In fact, it is almost always best not to respond to these messages. This type of feedback isn't really feedback at all. It is best to ignore this variety of feedback, and when appropriate, to remove it as soon as possible from the medium and/or report the user to appropriate application support.

5. Security

City staff needs to take every caution to prevent fraud or unauthorized access to social media applications. In almost every case where an attacker accesses a system without authorization, he/she does so with the intent to cause harm, including:

- Making unofficial posts, tweets or messages that will be seen by the public as official messages.
- Encouraging users to either click links or download unwanted applications that the attacker has added to the site.
- Accessing, compromising or disabling a city system.
- Redirecting users to sites that look like a city site but are used to gather data that could be used for unauthorized purposes (e.g. phishing)
- Using a compromised site to spread malware.
- Acquiring confidential information about city employees or citizens (e.g. social engineering).

How to Mitigate Security Risks

Security related to social media is fundamentally a behavioral issue, not typically a technology issue. In general, employees unwittingly providing information to third parties

pose a risk to the city network. Employees need to be aware of current and emerging threats that they may face using social media sites and how to avoid falling prey. The following are best practices when using social media:

- A separate user ID and password must be used to access social media sites, NEVER use your City Network username and password
- Never duplicate user IDs and passwords across multiple social media sites
- Learn more about security awareness and risks when using social media
- Ensure privacy settings are set appropriately
- Review (and apply as appropriate) patches for Firefox, Adobe and Java as these softwares can be common paths for security vulnerabilities.

6. Records Retention

The following shall apply regarding the retention of City business, information or public records of posts to social media applications and tools:

- All content published and received by the city using social media in connection with the transaction of the city's public business are public records in accordance with the Texas Public Information Act (https://www.oag.state.tx.us/ag_publications/pdfs/publicinfo_hb.pdf)
- The city remains responsible for capturing electronic copies of its public records made or received using social media, including those records made or received using third-party websites. All City employees and users are prohibited from deleting, altering, or in any way destroying, obliterating or tampering with the social media posts once they have been officially entered into the social medium.
- All City employees are responsible for keeping their individual access information confidential and they will be held individually accountable for all entries made under their access data. It is no defense that the computer was accessible to others or that someone else might have tampered, deleted, or made an unauthorized post while the system was accessed by a third party, if the employee left the access open and/or unattended.
- The city retains public records and disposes social media public records in accordance with Texas State Records Retention Schedule (<https://www.tsl.state.tx.us/slr/recordspubs/rrs4.html>)

7. Disclaimer

These guidelines are intended to supplement - not replace - the City of Seabrook's Personnel Policies. Policies on confidentiality, controversial issues, personal use of city equipment, professionalism, references for former employees, publication of articles, unlawful harassment

and other rules of conduct addressed in other policies are not affected, altered or amended by these guidelines. If not specifically addressed in this policy, an issue often can be clarified by reference to other City of Seabrook policies. Similarly, conduct that violates this policy will be subject to the same action as set forth in City personnel policies and may be disciplined accordingly.

8. Questions, Comment and Concerns

If, at any time, there is an uncertainty about how to apply these guidelines or questions arise regarding participation in social media, all employees are directed to seek the guidance of the City Manager or employee designated by the City Manager responsible for all social media assets. Social media is in a state of constant change and the City of Seabrook recognizes that there will likely be events or issues that are not addressed in these guidelines. Therefore, the responsibility falls to each individual to use good judgment, and when in doubt, to ask for clarification or authorization before engaging in questionable online conduct. Any employee who observes questionable or inappropriate social media conduct or posts whether on City official sites or on personal or private sites that could be a violation of this policy or potentially negatively impact the City of Seabrook, are directed to report this information to the City Manager or employee designated by the City Manager responsible for all social media assets.

Appendix A

As stated in Section 4 of this document, Acceptable Uses and Restrictions: Content, users and visitors must be notified of the intended purposes of Seabrook social media applications. A Social Media User Agreement is to be placed or linked on all social media sites to be executed before access may be allowed.

Social Media User Agreement

In an effort to communicate with a larger audience, the City of Seabrook maintains various types of social media applications. By accessing these applications, you are agreeing to the terms and conditions stated below.

The City of Seabrook intends to promote effective communication and maintain a respectful dialogue with users. In that spirit, the rules for posting external comments and content on Seabrook social media sites should maintain an open forum for community discussion and comment.

The City's social media system is monitored to ensure that posted comments and included content are constructive and suitable for all readers and users, while respecting a wide and unfettered range of opinions and points of view. So that you are advised and comfortable to participate fully, the City of Seabrook social media system's sites, comments, links and uploads containing any of the following prohibited material/matter shall NOT be allowed:

- Comments in support of or opposition to political campaigns or ballot measures.
- Profane language or content. Abusive or disparaging comments directed at individual(s).
- Content that promotes, fosters, or perpetuates discrimination on the basis of race, creed, color, age, religion, gender, marital status or lack thereof, socio-economic status of individual(s), national origin, physical or mental disability or sexual orientation
- Sexual expression, discrimination, harassment or content of any kind or links to sexual content or pornography whether of an adult, minor or child.
- Any expression of conduct or encouragement of illegal activity
- Information that may tend to compromise the safety or security of the public or the City's public safety systems
- Any expression of words that would disparage right, title or interest of a legal ownership of any other individual or business.
- Comments that do not pertain to the topic under discussion; including comments containing links to other websites or pages which are not relevant to the topic under discussion
- References to or inappropriate characterizations of individuals including personal

attacks upon any member of the public, City employee or City official.

- Advertising or promotional announcements of private or commercial enterprises, even if not for profit unless the City is co-sponsoring such activity or event. Only City business related advertising (services) or promotional announcements (special events) are allowed.
- Individually identifiable information (e.g. address, phone number and social security numbers) of specific individuals be they City employees, officials or members of the public.

The City of Seabrook reserves the right to restrict or refuse to publish or re-post any content that is deemed in violation of these guidelines or any applicable federal, state or local law(s), including the terms of service or terms of use outlined by third-party social media application providers. The City of Seabrook reserves the right to block part or all of any given post/repost or to block users who violate these terms.