

Category: 300

Number: 326

Policy: SOCIAL MEDIA AND ETIQUETTE

Purpose: The purpose of this policy is to define and serve as primary document for the proper and respectful use of social media.

Authority: St. Clair County Board of Commissioners. Administrative policies shall be subject to revision or termination by the Board of Commissioners at its discretion. This policy replaces and supersedes any prior policy on this subject matter.

Application: This policy applies to all County employees, regardless of position.

Responsibility: The Human Resources Director or designee shall be responsible for the administration and enforcement of this policy.

Overview:

This policy establishes the County of St. Clair's position on the use of social media and provides guidelines on its management, administration and oversight. This policy is not meant to address one particular form of social media but rather social media in general terms as technology will outpace our ability to discover emerging technology and create policies governing its use. Common current examples of social media are Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, Snapchat, blogs, message boards, etc.

Social media has become some of our most powerful tools in communicating with residents and other interested parties. Social media can be utilized to provide information in written form or via photograph, video or audio of subjects such as road closures, events, weather emergencies, and similar communications. The County of St. Clair endeavors to use social media to speak with a consistent voice that is representative of the County and puts our efforts and events in the best light possible.

Not only does the County of St. Clair endorse the secure use of social media by its employees in a County-related capacity but also in a personal capacity. County employees have the same rights of free speech as other U.S. citizens however there are some additional obligations that come with working in the public sector.

The following guidelines are meant to provide precautionary guidance as well as restrictions and prohibitions on the use of social media by County employees on and off the clock. The County, through the Information Technology Department, reserves the right to block any application, social media or otherwise, determined to be a security risk.

Guidelines:

County Sanctioned Use of Social Media

1. All County and departmental social media sites or pages shall be approved by the Administrator or appropriate elected official and shall be administered by designee(s). Each site or page shall have multiple administrators and shall include Information Technology as an administrator, when available.
2. Social media pages shall clearly indicate they are maintained by the County or a department and shall have contact information prominently displayed.
3. Social media content shall adhere to applicable laws, regulations, and policies, including all information technology and records management policies of the County.
4. Any social media site operated by a County Department shall not promote private business fundraisers, events or other non-County related functions, providing it does not meet a public purpose.

5. Employees representing the County via County social media outlets shall do the following
 - a) Conduct themselves at all times as representatives of the County and, accordingly, shall adhere to all County standards of conduct and observe conventionally accepted protocols and proper decorum;
 - b) Identify themselves as an employee of the County;
 - c) Avoid posting, transmitting, or otherwise disseminating confidential information, including photographs or videos, related to County training, activities, or work-related assignments without express permission; and
 - d) Shall not conduct political activities or private business.
6. All content included on a site or page that is deactivated must be stored as required by Michigan Law or regulations.

Tik-Tok

1. The Social Media application, Tik-Tok, has been identified by the Federal Government, the National Security Administration, etc. as a national security risk and as such shall not be used/installed on any County owned device. Exceptions for law enforcement investigative purposes shall be granted. The Information Technology Department shall provide necessary protections to insure network security.
2. As a result of the risk level associated with the Tik-Tok application, no device connected to the County network shall be used to promote, inform or be installed in the use of County business.
3. Tik-tok shall not be available on any device connected to any County network resource, whether it be wi-fi, ethernet connected or public access point.

Personal Use of Social Media by Employees

1. County employees are free to express themselves as private citizens on their personal social media sites on matters of public concern to the degree that their speech does not meaningfully impair or impede the performance of duties, impair discipline by superiors, create disharmony among coworkers, or undermine the County's mission. Employees are encouraged in their social media bios to display 'Opinions are my own.'
2. County or department social media sites shall not be used by employees for personal social media purposes.
3. As public employees, personnel are cautioned that their speech either on or off duty, and in the course of their official duties, that has a link to the employee's professional duties and responsibilities or which brings disrespect on themselves or the County, will not be protected under the First Amendment.
 - a) Such conduct may form the basis for discipline if deemed detrimental to the County.
 - b) County employees should assume that their speech and related activity on social media sites will reflect upon their position within the County.
4. County employees shall not post, transmit, or otherwise disseminate any information to which they have access as a result of their employment without written permission from the Administrator/Controller or designee.
5. County employees shall not use County e-mail addresses to register on social networks, blogs or other online tools utilized for personal use.
6. Adherence to the County's code of conduct is required in the personal use of social media. In particular, County employees are prohibited from the following:
 - a) Speech containing obscene or sexually explicit language, images or acts and statements or other forms of speech that is discriminatory, harassing, threatening, defamatory, or invasive of another individual's privacy.
 - b) County employees may not divulge information gained by reason of their authority, make any statements, speeches, appearances, and endorsements or publish materials that could reasonably be considered to represent the views or positions of the County without express authorization;

- c) County employees should be aware that they may be subject to civil litigation for publishing or posting false information that harms the reputation of another person, group or organization, otherwise known as defamation, to include:
 - i. Publishing or posting private facts and personal information about someone without his or her permission that has not been previously revealed to the public, is not of legitimate public concern, and would be offensive to a reasonable person;
 - ii. Using someone else's name, likeness or other personal attributes without that person's permission for an exploitative purpose; or
 - iii. Publishing the creative work of another, trademarks, or certain confidential business information without the permission of the owner.
- 7. County employees should be aware that privacy settings and social media sites are constantly in flux. They should never assume that personal information posted on such sites is protected and should take care to understand a site's terms of service.
- 8. County employees should expect that any information created, transmitted, downloaded, exchanged or discussed in a public online forum may be accessed by the County at any time without prior notice; and
- 9. County employees are cautioned that a violation of this policy may result in discipline up to and including discharge. Each employee is expected to exercise sound judgment when using social media and to adhere to this policy in all respects.

When using social media, County employees shall be mindful that their speech becomes part of the World Wide Web. Whatever is published may be in the public domain permanently.

Reporting Violations

Any employee becoming aware of or having knowledge of a posting or of any website or webpage in violation of the provision of this policy shall notify his or her supervisor immediately for follow-up action.

Public Comment Policy on County Sanctioned Social Media Accounts

As a public entity the County of St. Clair must abide by certain standards to serve all its constituents in a civil and unbiased manner. Comments or content containing any of the following inappropriate forms of content shall not be permitted on our social media sites and are subject to removal and/or restriction by the County:

1. Comments not related to the business of the County (or specific department if department-specific site), or not relevant to the original topic;
2. Violent, profane, obscene or pornographic content and/or language;
3. Content that promotes, fosters or perpetuates discrimination on the basis of race, creed, color, age, religion, sexual orientation, gender, or national origin;
4. Content that threatens or defames any person or organization;
5. Content that is hateful or incites violence;
6. Solicitation of commerce, including but not limited to, advertising of any non-government related event, or business or product for sale;
7. Conduct in violation of any federal, state or local law;
8. Encouragement of any illegal activity;
9. Information that may tend to compromise the safety or security of the public or public systems; and
10. Content that violates a legal ownership interest, such as a copyright, of any party.
11. A comment posted by a member of the public on any County of St. Clair social media site is the opinion of the commentator or poster only, and publication of a comment does not imply endorsement of, or agreement by, the County, nor do such comments necessarily reflect the opinions or policies of the County of St. Clair.

The County reserves the right to deny access to County of St. Clair's social media sites for any individual, who violates the County's social media policy, at any time and without prior notice.

Appeals regarding the decision to remove a comment or individual may be submitted via email citizens@stclaircounty.org ; appeals will be responded to within two business days.

Departments shall monitor their social media sites for comments requesting responses from the County and for comments in violation of this policy.

All comments posted to any County of St. Clair site are bound by the social media platforms' Statement of Rights and Responsibilities and/or other governing documents. The County reserves the right to report any violation of a Statement of Rights and Responsibilities and/or other governing documents to the appropriate site with the intent of appropriate and reasonable responsive action being taken.

Reporting/Removal of Unauthorized Comments

The County requires that department-designated social media administrators document any posted material that may be inappropriate, that violates this policy, or any County policy, is illegal, or that potentially infringes the copyrights or other rights of any persons. The Administrator/Controller's office will investigate and respond to all reports of potential violations of this policy.

Any content removed based on these guidelines must be retained by the sponsoring department as required by Michigan law or regulations. including the time, date and identity of the poster, when available. Upon removal of content, the social media administrator shall notify the commenter that his or her response has been deemed inappropriate and removed due to inconsistency with the County's content requirements.

The County reserves the right, at any time and without prior notice, to deny access to the social media site to any individual who violates this policy.

Terms of Use for Constituents

The County of St. Clair's social media pages maintain a "Terms of Use" agreement for its constituents. A link to the terms of use should be identified on all social media sites or pages. All comments posted to any County social media site are bound by these Terms of Use and the County reserves the right to report any user violation. Terms of Use can be found at on the County of St. Clair's website at <https://www.stclaircounty.org/> and visitors to the County's sites are expected to follow these guidelines.

County Website

The County of St. Clair's website at <https://www.stclaircounty.org/> will remain the County's primary and predominant Internet presence.

For further information, an employee may contact the Human Resources department by telephone at (810) 989-6910 or by email at humanresources@stclaircounty.org.

Review: The Administrator/Controller has reviewed and approved this policy as to substance and Corporation Counsel has reviewed and approved as to legal content. The Human Resources Director shall periodically review this policy and make recommendations for changes as needed.

Adopted: 04/20/23