



# City of Virginia

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## SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

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### **Purpose**

Social networking in government serves two primary functions: to communicate and deliver messages directly to citizens and to encourage citizen involvement, interaction, and feedback. Information which is distributed via social networking must be accurate, consistent, and timely and meet the information needs of the City's customers. Since social media is used for social networking, this policy seeks to ensure proper use of the City of Virginia's social media sites by its representatives.

The City of Virginia wishes to establish a positive and informative social media presence. City representatives have the responsibility to use the City's social media resources in an efficient, effective, ethical and lawful manner pursuant to all existing City and departmental policies. This policy also provides guidelines and standards for city representatives regarding the use of social media for communication with residents, colleagues and all other followers.

### **Policy**

The City of Virginia will determine, at its discretion, how its web-based social media resources will be designed, implemented and managed as part of its overall communication and information sharing strategy. City social media sites may be modified or removed by the City at any time and without notice, as described in this document.

City of Virginia social media accounts are considered a City asset and administrator access to these accounts must be securely administered in accordance with the City's Computer Use policy. The City reserves the right to shut down any of its social media sites or accounts for any reason without notice.

All social media web sites created and utilized during the course and scope of an employee's performance of his/her job duties will be identified as belonging to the City of Virginia, including a link to the City's official web site.

### **Scope**

This policy applies to any existing or proposed social media web sites sponsored, established, registered or authorized by the City of Virginia. This policy also covers the private use of the City's social media accounts by all City representatives, including its employees and agents, Council members, appointed board or commission members and all public safety volunteers to the extent it affects the City. Questions regarding the scope of this policy should be directed to the City Administrator.

## Definition

Social media are internet and mobile-based applications, websites and functions, other than email, for sharing and discussing information, where users can post photos, video, comments and links to other information to create content on any imaginable topic. This may be referred to as “user-generated content” or “consumer-generated media.”

Social media includes, but is not limited to:

- Social networking sites such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, and online dating services/mobile apps
- Blogs
- Social news sites such as Reddit and BuzzFeed
- Video and photo sharing sites such as YouTube, Instagram, SnapChat, and Flickr
- Wikis, or shared encyclopedias such as Wikipedia
- An ever emerging list of new web-based platforms generally regarded as social media or having many of the same functions as those listed above

As used in this policy, “employees and agents” means all City representatives, including its employees and other agents of the city, such as independent contractors or Council members.

## Rules of Use

City employees and agents with administrator access are responsible for managing social media websites. Facilities or departments wishing to have a new social media presence must initially submit a request to the City Administrator or Information Technology Staff in order to ensure social media accounts are kept to a sustainable number and policies are followed. All approved sites will be clearly marked as the City of Virginia site and will be linked with the official City websites ([www.virginiamn.us](http://www.virginiamn.us), [www.virginiapubliclibrary.info](http://www.virginiapubliclibrary.info)). No one may establish social media accounts or websites on behalf of the City unless authorized in accordance with this policy

Posting guidelines:

- a. Social media sites must be maintained and updated by the persons identified as the primary employee. Any sites not maintained or updates shall be removed.
- b. Posts announcing events should be done at least one week in advance of the event with a reminder 1-2 days prior.
- c. The City maintains the right to delete any comments containing profanity, vulgarity, or which are demeaning or inflammatory to other people.
- d. The City will document deleted posts (save thread to a file), along with the specific reason for deleting.
- e. Administration of all social media web sites must comply with applicable laws, regulations, and policies as well as proper business etiquette.

City social media accounts accessed and utilized during the course and scope of an employee’s performance of his/her job duties may not be used for private or personal purposes or for the purpose of expressing private or personal views on personal, political or policy issues or to express personal views or concerns pertaining to City employment relations matters.

No social media website may be used by the City or any City employee or agent to disclose private or confidential information. No social media web site should be used to disclose sensitive information; if there is any question as to whether information is private, confidential or sensitive, contact the City Administrator or City Attorney.

When using social media sites as a representative of the City, employees and agents will act in a professional manner. Examples include but are not limited to:

- Adhere to all City personnel and Computer Use policies
- Use only appropriate language

Be aware that content will not only reflect on the writer but also on the City of Virginia as a whole, including elected officials and other city employees and agents. Make sure information is accurate and free of grammatical errors.

- Not providing private or confidential information, including names, or using such material as part of any content added to a site.
- Not negatively commenting on community partners or their services, or using such material as part of any content added to a site.
- Not providing information related to pending decisions that would compromise negotiations.
- Be aware that all content added to a site is subject to open records/right to know laws and discovery in legal cases.
- Always keep in mind the appropriateness of content.
- Comply with any existing code of ethical behavior established by the City.

### **Social Media Posting Guidelines (Including 3<sup>rd</sup> Party Requests)**

1. Content shall not include comments that are offensive, inflammatory, or spam. Postings may include, but are not limited to:

- a. City-sponsored events
- b. Community events
- c. Community updates such as emergency water-shutoffs, detours, etc.

2. Postings may not include:

- a. Commercial sales or events
- b. Garages sales or items for sale for profit
- c. Events hosted that are not community events
- d. Political commentary

3. Respect proprietary information, content, and confidentiality. Give credit to appropriate persons when required.

### **Answering/Moderating Comments & Questions Received**

If comments are allowed on City social media sites, account administrators shall reply to questions and comments in a timely manner, when a response is appropriate.

Where moderation of comments is an available option, comments from the public will be moderated by City staff, with administrative rights, before posting. Where moderation prior to posting is not an option, sites will be regularly monitored by City staff.

City of Virginia's staff with administrative rights will not edit any posted comments. However, comments posted by members of the public will be removed if they are abusive, obscene, defamatory, in violation of the copyright, trademark right or other intellectual property right of any third party, or otherwise inappropriate or incorrect. The following are examples of content that may be removed by City staff before or shortly after being published:

- Potentially libelous comments
- Obscene or racist comments
- Personal attacks, insults, or threatening language
- Plagiarized material
- Private, personal information published without consent
- Comments totally unrelated to the topic of the forum
- Commercial promotions or spam
- Hyperlinks to material that is not directly related to the discussion

### **Personal Social Media Use**

The City of Virginia respects employees and agents' rights to post and maintain personal websites, blogs and social media pages and to use and enjoy social media on their own personal devices during non-work hours. The City requires employees and agents to act in a prudent manner with regard to website and internet postings that reference the City of Virginia, its personnel, its operation or its property. Employees and agents and others affiliated with the City may not use a city brand, logo or other city identifiers on their personal sites, nor post information that purports to be the position of the City without prior authorization.

City employees and agents are discouraged from identifying themselves as city employees when responding to or commenting on blogs with personal opinions or views. If an employee chooses to identify him or herself as a City of Virginia employee, and posts a statement on a matter related to City business, a disclaimer similar to the following must be used:

“These are my own opinions and do not represent those of the City.”

Occasional access to personal social media websites during work hours is permitted, but employees and agents must adhere to the guidelines outlined in the City's Computer Use policy and the City's Respectful Workplace policy. Employees and agents should also review the Ownership section of this policy (below).

There may be times when personal use of social media (even if it is off-duty or using the employee's own equipment) may spill over into the workplace and become the basis for employee coaching or discipline. Examples of situations where this might occur include:

- Friendships, dating or romance between co-workers
- Cyber-bullying, stalking or harassment

- Release of confidential or private data; if there are questions about what constitute confidential or private data, contact the City Administrator or City Attorney.
- Unlawful activities
- Misuse of city-owned social media
- Inappropriate use of the city's name, logo or the employee's position or title
- Using city-owned equipment or city-time for extensive personal social media use

Each situation will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis because the laws in this area are complex. If you have any questions about what types of activities might result in discipline, please discuss the type of usage with the City Administrator or Information Technology Staff.

### **Data Ownership**

All social media communications or messages composed, sent, or received on either city or personally owned equipment when in an official capacity are the property of the City and will be subject to the Minnesota Government Data Practices Act. This law classifies certain information as available to the public upon request. The City of Virginia also maintains the sole property rights to any image, video or audio captured while a City employee is representing the City in any capacity. Furthermore, the retention of social media data is considered transitory and will be deleted immediately after the information has served its purpose.

The City retains the right to monitor employee's social media use on city equipment and will exercise its right as necessary. Users should have no expectation of privacy. Social media is not a secure means of communication.

### **Policy Violations**

Violations of the Policy will subject the employee to disciplinary action up to and including discharge from employment.

### **Effective Date**

This policy becomes effective upon adoption by the City Council.

Adopted by the City Council of the City of Virginia on 06/27/17.

Modified on January 2, 2018