



Hays County

SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

Effective January 1, 2019

PURPOSE

Use and monitoring of social media sites requires employee time that directly impacts productivity and results in costs to taxpayers. The purpose of the Hays County social media policy is to provide rules and set public expectations for conduct by and content developed/published by elected officials, department heads and employees who:

- a. use social media for Hays County business,
- b. access social media venues while on duty, and/or
- c. use Hays County equipment (i.e., computers, Internet access) to connect to social media sites.

In addition, this policy provides guidelines for off-duty elected officials, department heads, and employees who access or maintain social media sites and identify themselves as or may be identified by others as Hays County employees.

This policy is in effect immediately upon adoption by the Commissioners Court.

POLICY

See Attachment A for Definitions

1. Hays County offices/departments may use County-approved* social media and social network sites to further enhance communications with various stakeholder organizations in support of County goals and objectives:

- a. if the elected official/department head demonstrates a business need to do so and that need is approved by the Director of Information Technology and the Director of Human Resources or their designees and the Hays County Commissioners Court;
- b. develops a content plan that is approved by the Director of Information Technology and the Director of Human Resources or their designees; and
- c. ensures that content is updated/refreshed in a timely manner.

In addition to any office/department-specific Facebook pages that are authorized, Hays County will maintain one Facebook page to support all County offices/departments as a one-way communications vehicle. Information requested to be placed on the Facebook page must be approved by the requesting office/department head and by the Communications Manager or IT Director or their designees.

Hays County will maintain one Twitter account. All Tweets from County offices/departments will first be approved by the office/department head and by either the Communications Manager or the IT Director and will be issued via the County Twitter Account.

The Hays County Sheriff's Office and Hays County Emergency Management Office are authorized to maintain separate Twitter or NIXL accounts, if so desired, for use in 24/7 emergency communications. Those account names will be approved and issued **by IT for those two offices/departments. Fee-based accounts, such as NIXL, must be paid for by the requesting office/department and budget must be approved** by the Commissioners Court. The official/department head will be responsible for ensuring that all communications are related to necessary County business.

Other offices/departments that can establish a business need for a separate Twitter account must have that need approved first by the Hays County Communications Manager and then by the Hays County Commissioners Court.

Two-way communications (i.e., allowing persons to post information or responses on a Hays County-approved social media site) will be approved case-by-case based on demonstration of a business need by the Hays County Communications Manager and the Hays County Commissioners Court. See Attachment B Social Media Comments Standards Policy.

*Current County-approved social media for consideration for use by individual offices/departments, with proper approvals, include Facebook, Twitter, Nextdoor, Nixle, YouTube, LinkedIn, Flickr®, Photobucket, Instagram, Snapchat, and Tumblr.

Any office/department that is already using social media has 90 days from the adoption of this policy to comply with this policy.

2. During emergency situations, the County Judge may request that offices and departments using social media adhere to the County's intent to "speak with one voice" and re-issue only information authorized by the County Judge, Communications Manager and/or Emergency Management Director or their designees.

3. Following approval, all Hays County social media sites shall be

- a. published using approved County social networking platform and tools; and
- b. administered by the Department of Information Technology Director or his/her designee. Designees can be any office/department employee or volunteer who has a complete understanding of this policy and has appropriate content and technical experience and is designated by the requesting elected official/department head.

The IT Department will maintain administrative access to each site/account at all times and will be responsible for collecting and assigning all domain names to Hays County social media venues.

4. The County website shall remain the primary and predominant source for Internet information. All social networking sites shall clearly indicate they are maintained by Hays County and shall have Hays County contact information and County seal prominently displayed. Each social networking site must include a link to the official Hays County Web site for forms, documents and other information. Each Hays County social networking site shall include an introductory statement which clearly specifies the purpose and topical scope of the social network site.

5. All Hays County social networking sites shall adhere to applicable state, federal and local laws, regulations and all County policies, including but not limited to Communications, Information Technology and Records Management. Freedom of Information Act and e-discovery laws and

policies apply to social media content and therefore content must be able to be managed, stored and retrieved to comply with these laws.

6. Hays County social networking sites are subject to State of Texas public records laws. Relevant records retention schedules apply to social networking content. Records required to be maintained pursuant to a relevant records retention schedule shall be maintained for the required retention period in a format that preserves the integrity of the original record and is easily accessible using the approved County platforms and tools.

- a. Content submitted for posting that is deemed not suitable for posting by a Hays County social networking moderator because it is not topically related to the particular social networking site objective being commented upon, or is deemed prohibited content based on the criteria in Policy Item 7 of this policy, shall be retained pursuant to the records retention schedule along with a description of the reason the specific content is deemed not suitable for posting.
- b. All social network sites and entries shall clearly indicate that any articles and any other content posted or submitted for posting are subject to public disclosure. Each site must link to the County's **Social Media Comments Policy** which is part of this document and will be posted and maintained by the IT Department.

7. Hays County reserves the right to restrict or remove any content that is deemed in violation of this policy or any applicable law. Each office/department is responsible for monitoring postings and taking appropriate action when necessary, to protect general site visitors from inappropriate or technically harmful information and links.

8. Hays County social networking content and comments containing any of the following forms of content shall not be allowed for posting:

- a. Comments not topically related to the particular site or blog article being commented upon;
- b. Profane language or content;
- c. Content that promotes, fosters, or perpetuates discrimination on the basis of race, creed, color, age, religion, gender, marital status, status with regard to public assistance, national origin, physical or mental disability or sexual orientation;
- d. Sexual content or links to sexual content;
- e. Solicitations of commerce;
- f. Conduct or encouragement of illegal activity;
- g. Information that may tend to compromise the safety or security of the public or public systems; or
- h. Content that violates a legal ownership interest of any other party, including but not limited to drawings, pictures, photos, logos and text.

9. All Hays County social networking moderators shall be responsible for enforcing the terms of this policy, including but not limited to reviewing content submitted for posting to ensure compliance with the policy.

10. County IT security policies shall apply to all social networking sites and articles.

11. County employees authorized to use social media technology shall do so only within the scope defined by their respective County office/department and in compliance with all County policies, practices and use agreements. Employees representing the County government via social media outlets must conduct themselves at all times as a representative of the County and in accordance

with all County policies. Employees shall obey all laws, including but not limited to the Hatch Act when using social media.

See Attachment C—Employee Guidance for Participating in Social Networking.

12. Employees found in violation of this policy may be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment.

ATTACHMENT A. Definitions

For the purpose of this Hays County Social Media Policy, the following terms are defined as provided below:

1. **Social Media:** Social media is content created by individuals using accessible and scalable technologies through the Internet. Examples of social media include Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, blogs, , YouTube, Twitter, LinkedIn, Flickr, etc. Not all social media are approved for use by Hays County at this time. Approved social media include Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, Nixle, YouTube, Nextdoor, LinkedIn, Tumblr, Flickr and Photobucket.
2. **Blog:** (an abridgment of the term web log) is a Hays County website with regular entries for the purpose of commentary, descriptions of events or other material such as graphics or video.
3. **Hays County author:** An authorized Hays County employee who creates and is responsible for posted articles and information on social media sites.
4. **Article:** An original posting of content to a Hays County social media site by a Hays County author.
5. **Commenter:** A Hays County employee or member of the public who submits a comment for posting in response to the content of a particular Hays County article or other social media content.
6. **Comment:** A response to a Hays County article or social media content submitted by a commenter.
7. **Hays County moderator:** An authorized Hays County official/employee who reviews, authorizes and allows content submitted by Hays County authors and public commentators to be posted to a Hays County social media site.

ATTACHMENT B. Social Media Comments Standards Policy

1. When two-way communications is authorized by the County for a County-approved social media venue:
 - a. Comments submitted by members of the public must be directly related to the content of the articles.
 - b. Submission of comments by members of the public constitutes participation in a limited public forum.
 - c. Hays County moderators shall allow comments that are topically related to the particular article being commented and thus within the purpose of the limited public forum, with the exception of the prohibited content listed in Policy Section 7 above.
 - d. All members of the public who wish to post comments must first be directed to read and accept the Hays County Terms of Use agreement, which will be posted on the Hays County website and Facebook page and accessible via the Notes section of each office/department Facebook page that is authorized to accept comments.

2. Author and Commenter Identification

a. All Hays County authors and public commentators shall be clearly identified. Anonymous postings shall not be allowed, nor will use of “handles” that do not represent the author/commentator’s true name.

b. Enrollment of public commentators shall be accompanied by valid contact information, including a name, address, and email address. Street addresses and phone numbers should NOT be included online.

3. Ownership and Moderation

a. The content of each Hays County social media venue shall be the sole responsibility of the office/department producing and using the site.

b. Documents and articles submitted to a Hays County social media venue shall be moderated by an authorized moderator representing the County.

4. Social Media Comments & Responses

a. All articles and comments shall be reviewed and approved by an authorized moderator before posting on a Hays County social media site.

b. All articles and comments submitted for posting with attached content shall be scanned using antivirus technology prior to posting.

c. The linked content of embedded hyperlinks within any Hays County articles or comments submitted for posting shall be evaluated by that office/department prior to posting.

d. Any posted hyperlinks that do not lead to a local, state, county or U.S. government site shall be accompanied by a disclaimer stating that: Hays County guarantees neither the authenticity, accuracy, appropriateness nor security of the link, web site or content linked thereto.

e. It is strongly recommended that any link be vetted in advance of posting by the Hays County IT Department. Some links contain embedded links that go to material that could be considered objectionable; some link names can be easily confused with previously vetted links, etc.

ATTACHMENT C. Employee Guidance for Participating in Social Networking

Hays County understands that social networking and Internet services have become a common form of communication in the workplace and among stakeholders and citizens. Social networks are online communities of people or organizations that share interests and/or activities and use a wide variety of Internet technology to make the interaction a rich and robust experience. Employees who choose to participate in social networks as a County employee should adhere to the following guidelines:

1. County policies, rules, regulations and standards of conduct apply to employees that engage in social networking activities while conducting County business. Use of your County e-mail address and communicating in your official capacity will constitute conducting County business.

2. All County social networking sites must be authorized by the official/department head of that office/department.

3. Offices/departments have the option of allowing employees to participate in existing social networking sites as part of their job duties. Officials/Department Heads may allow or disallow employee participation in any social networking activities in their offices/departments.

4. Protect your privacy, the privacy of citizens, and the information the County holds. Follow all privacy protection laws, i.e., HIPPA, and protect sensitive and confidential County information.

5. Follow all copyright laws, public records laws, retention laws, fair use and financial disclosure laws and any other laws that might apply to the County or your functional area. Information posted on the Internet may be copyrighted and must not be used until permission is given by the author of the information.

6. Do not cite vendors, suppliers, clients, citizens, co-workers or other stakeholders without their approval in writing/email.
7. If you publish content on any website outside of a Hays County site and it is connected to the work you do or subjects associated with the County, use a disclaimer such as this: "The postings on this site are my own and don't necessarily represent the County's positions or opinions." Do not use your County email address for non-County-approved postings.
8. Do not use ethnic slurs, profanity, personal insults, or engage in any conduct that would not be acceptable in the County's workplace. Avoid comments or topics that may be considered objectionable or inflammatory. See Policy Section 7 for complete information.
9. If you identify yourself as a County employee, ensure your profile and related content is consistent with how you wish to present yourself to colleagues, citizens and other stakeholders.
10. Correct your mistakes, and don't alter previous posts without indicating that you have done so. Frame any comments or opposing views in a positive manner.

Social Media Comments Policy

All Hays County social media sites that are authorized to receive outside comments must link to the County's social media comments policy page using a standardized button available from IT upon approval of two-way commenting. The IT department will maintain this page, the current text is included here for information purposes, and will be updated as necessary. The policy page currently reads as indicated below and will be modified as needed with the approval of the IT Director, Communications Manager and General Counsel.

Hays County social media sites are designed to present matters of public interest in Hays County. We encourage you to submit your questions, comments and concerns to those sites that allow comments, but please note that Hays County social media sites are moderated online discussion sites and not public forums.

Once posted, Hays County reserves the right to delete submissions that contain vulgar language, personal attacks of any kind, offensive comments that target or disparage any ethnic, racial or religious group or that promotes, fosters or perpetuates discrimination on the basis of race, creed, color, age, religion, gender, marital status, sexual orientation, status with regards to public assistance, national origin or physical or mental disability.

Further, the County also reserves the right to delete comments that are spam or include links to other sites, clearly off topic, advocate illegal activity, promote particular services, products or political organizations, infringe on copyright or trademarks, use personally identifiable medical information – we recommend that you not share any medical or other sensitive information on our social media sites.

Please note that comments expressed on our social media sites do not reflect the opinions and position of Hays County government or its employees. If you have any questions concerning the operation of any of our online moderated discussion sites, please contact the Communications Manager at 512-461-2296 or communicationsspecialist@co.hays.tx.us.