

TO: ALL COUNTY PERSONNEL  
FROM: VERDENIA C. BAKER  
COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR  
PREPARED BY: PUBLIC AFFAIRS DEPARTMENT  
SUBJECT: SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY  
PPM#: CW-R-013

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ISSUE DATE  
January 20, 2021

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EFFECTIVE DATE  
January 20, 2021

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PURPOSE:

To define the social media policy for Palm Beach County, and address the fast-changing landscape of the Internet and the way residents and tourists communicate and obtain information online. County departments may consider using social media tools to reach a broader audience and offer the public timely customer service. This policy establishes guidelines for the use of social media.

UPDATES:

Future updates to this PPM are the responsibility of the Director of the Department of Public Affairs.

AUTHORITY:

- Florida Statutes, Chapter 119 as may be amended.
- Florida Statutes, Chapter 286 as may be amended.
- Internet Use Policy (PPM # CW-R-008)

BACKGROUND:

Social media serves as a vast source of information and has quickly evolved into a powerful communications tool. Social media is important to County departments as well as members of the public who wish to obtain information about local government issues, projects and services. Governmental organizations are increasingly using social media to enhance County branding, improve the quality of services, and provide additional outlets for sending and receiving information. Conversely, unrestricted use of social media has the potential to adversely affect, rather than enhance productivity.

## POLICY:

Social media services are to be used in a responsible, efficient, ethical, and legal manner to support services and programs of Palm Beach County. Use of social media services for official County business use shall be at the discretion of each Department Director. If a Department Director decides to use social media for his/her department, failure to adhere to this PPM and administrative procedures may result in suspension or revocation of social media access. Willful or intentional misuse may lead to disciplinary action under applicable provisions of the Palm Beach County Merit Rules.

The County reserves the right not to publish any business related postings and can remove postings at any time.

## ACCEPTABLE USE

The following guidance is intended for County employees who decide to have a personal social media site or who decide to comment on posts about official County business:

- State your name and, if relevant, role, when discussing County business;
- Use a disclaimer such as “The postings on this site are my own and don’t reflect or represent the opinions of the County for which I work.”

### Personal Use

All County employees may have personal social media sites. These sites should remain personal in nature and be used to share personal opinions or non-business related information. Following this principle, helps ensure a distinction between sharing personal and County views.

Postings referencing official County business, programs and/or events are permitted. When referencing county business, programs and/or events a relevant hash tag may be used e.g. #PBC, #PalmBeachCounty). County employees must never use their County email account or password to establish a personal social media site.

### Professional Use

All official County-related communication published through social media must remain professional in nature. Employees must not use official County social media sites for political purposes, to conduct private commercial transactions, or to engage in private business activities.

County employees should be mindful that inappropriate usage of official County social media sites may be grounds for disciplinary action. If social media sites are used for official County information. The entire County site, regardless of any personal views, is subject to best practices guidelines, and standards. Only individuals authorized by the County may publish content to a County social media site.

## **RESPONSIBILITIES:**

Primary responsibilities relating to social media use are outlined below.

Public Affairs shall:

1. Establish the County policy on social media; and
2. Establish design standards for social media accounts (see Attachment 1).

County Department Directors who desire to increase public awareness of County programs, policies and services through social media shall:

1. Designate an employee in charge of posting on the social networks;
2. Adhere to design standards for social media accounts, as established by the County's Public Affairs Department and as more particularly described in Attachment 1 to this PPM;
3. Monitor program for compliance;
4. Maintain up-to-date public records; and
5. Monitor photo/image use. Photos and images used in any postings that are not self-shot must be credited appropriately and with permission, if required. The use of copyright photos and images is prohibited; unless stated permission was given for use e.g. Getty Images.

### **Approval and Registration**

All County social media sites shall be (1) approved by Public Affairs; (2) published using approved social media platforms and tools; and (3) administered by the contact or their designee. See Attachment 1.

### **Appropriate Use of County Social Media Accounts**

Employees representing the County through social media outlets or participating in social media features on County websites must maintain a high level of ethical conduct and professional decorum. Failure to do so is grounds for revoking the privilege to participate in County social media sites, blogs, or other social media features, as well as disciplinary action. Information must be presented following professional standards for proper grammar, spelling, brevity, clarity and accuracy; and to avoid jargon, obscure terminology, or acronyms. County employees recognize that the content and messages they post on social media websites are public and may be cited as official County statements. Social media should not be used to circumvent other County communication policies, including news media policy requirements.

County employees may not publish information on County social media sites that includes:

- confidential information
- copyright violations

- profanity, racist, religious, sexist, or derogatory content or comments
- partisan political views
- commercial endorsements or SPAM
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- obscenities or material that appeals to the prurient interest
- contains personal identifying or protected personal information in violation of Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA)
- offensive terms that target protected classes
- is threatening, harassing or discriminatory
- promotion of violence or illegal activities
- information that could compromise individual or public safety
- advertisements of a commercial product or service, or any entity or individual with the exception of revenue generating departments or special circumstances relating to communication during states of emergency.
- promotions or endorsements of political campaigns or candidates

### Records Retention

Social media sites contain communications sent to or received by the County and its employees, and such communications are therefore public records subject to Florida Statutes, Chapters 119. Retention requirements apply regardless of the form of the record e.g.: digital text, photos, audio, and video.

The Department maintaining a site shall preserve records pursuant to a relevant records retention schedule for the required retention period in a format that preserves the integrity of the original record and is easily accessible. Furthermore, retention of social media records shall fulfill the following requirements:

- Social media records are captured in a continuous, automated fashion throughout the day to minimize a potential loss of data due to deletion and/or changes on the social media site.

Social media records are maintained in an authentic format.

- Social media records are archived in a system that preserves the context of communications, including conversation threads and rich media, to ensure completeness and availability of relevant information when records are accessed.
- Social media records are indexed based on specific criteria such as date, content type, and keywords to ensure that records can be quickly located and produced in an appropriate format for distribution e.g. PDF.
- Each employee who administers one or more social media sites on behalf of the County has self-service, read-only access to search and produce relevant social media records to fulfill public record and legal discovery requests as needed.

Palm Beach County utilizes an automated archiving solution to comply with applicable public records law and fulfill the above records retention requirements. All County departments establishing new social media accounts must provide the log in credentials to Public Affairs to ensure each account is archived and searchable.

## EXTERNAL POLICY

The following guidelines must be displayed to users on all social media sites or made available via hyperlink:

### Monitoring of Third Party Content

This County social media site serves as a limited public forum and all content published is subject to monitoring. User-generated posts will be rejected or removed (if possible) when the content includes:

- confidential information
- copyright violations
- profanity, racist, religious, sexist, or derogatory content or comments
- partisan political views
- commercial endorsements or SPAM
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- obscenities or material that appeals to the prurient interest
- contains personal identifying or protected personal information in violation of Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA)
- offensive terms that target protected classes
- is threatening, harassing or discriminatory
- promotion of violence or illegal activities
- information that could compromise individual or public safety
- advertisements of a commercial product or service, or any entity or individual
- promotions or endorsements of political campaigns or candidates

### Public Records Law

County social media sites are subject to applicable public records laws. Any content maintained in a social media format related to County business, including communication posted by the County and communication received from residents and tourists, is a public record in accordance with PPM # CW-F-002. The department maintaining the site is responsible for responding completely and accurately to any public records request for social media content.

  
VERDENIA C. BAKER  
COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

### Supersession History:

-- PPM # CW-R-013, issued 08/02/2010

- PPM # CW-R-013, issued 09/07/2011
- PPM # CW-R-013, issued 08/13/2012
- PPM # CW-R-013, issued 02/15/2019