

CASWELL COUNTY POLICIES AND PROCEDURES				
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## Caswell County Social Media Policy

### FIRST STEPS

So...you want to open a Twitter, Facebook, Flickr, Blogger, Google Docs, Picasa, Zoho and LinkedIn or other social media account. In order to open a social media account, you must:

1. Advise your direct supervisor and Department Leader that you are interested in creating a social media account. **You should have clear goals and strategies as well as a defined target audience. You also should know what types of information you will post (images, news releases, quick news items, event information, data/statistics, last-minute alerts, etc.).**
2. Sign and submit the county’s Social Media Policy Agreement. In summary, it states that you, the employee, and any others involved with the account will abide by the rules and guidelines stated in this policy. The Department Leader is also required to sign the agreement.
3. Work with IT to obtain a special county email address to use for your account and to work with you on a solution to back up your postings for public record requirements.
4. Once you have approval to proceed, open your account with the special county email address.
5. Make sure that you provide your login and password information to your direct supervisor and Department Leader, who will maintain a master directory for monitoring and emergency purposes. Your direct supervisor and Department Leader must be notified of any login or password changes.
6. Strongly consider using one of the following social media because IT has software that would allow you to back up posts to comply with public records retention requirements: Twitter, Facebook, Flickr, Blogger, Google Docs, Google sites, Google Calendar, Gmail, Google contacts, Picasa, Zoho and LinkedIn. Otherwise, departments will have to work with IT on how to back up postings manually.

### THE RULES

Remember that you are posting information as a county representative. All information must be pertinent, useful, job-related, professional, and appropriate to Caswell County government, and within your authority to share and distribute. Social media is living media—constantly changing to improve interaction and usage. Thus, the social media policy will **evolve** over time to adapt to new tools and facets. Accordingly, this policy will change and it is your responsibility to stay updated on changes to the policy and rules.

### Public Comments

With the exception of Twitter, remember that you are responsible for making sure that any social media accounts that allow public comment are monitored to ensure compliance with the rules for public comment stated in this policy on page 4 as a required public disclaimer.

- **Facebook:** Should you decide to have a Facebook account, it should be set up as a business/organizational account with a page and ‘likers’ (formerly fans), not ‘friends’ that you have for personal account. Make sure that your **privacy settings** are stringent so that you do

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not allow any posting by 'likers' (your opt-in users). Any postings by Facebook 'likers' (formerly fans) are public record and have to be maintained as such (see pages 3-4). While the purpose of social media is to engage, this will help limit interaction in the interest of time and unnecessary conversation. **However, it is important to note that 'likers' can post *in response to your postings, so these public comments must be maintained as a public record.*** Facebook is ever-evolving, as are the other social media resources.

- **Twitter:** Using Twitter, your followers can respond to you and you are unable to delete their postings. Any replies (mentions) from followers do not appear on your Twitter page, but people can do a search and find replies to you. As to direct (private) messages to or from your followers, they also do not appear on your Twitter page because they are not visible publicly at all. You also can't delete another person's direct messages to you. The fact that followers' tweets to you do NOT appear on your Twitter page makes oversight of Twitter less complicated than most other social media, but you do have to be consistent about checking any replies to see if there are some that require follow up.
- **Blogs:** With blogs, the public can comment but you can adjust your settings so that you must authorize their comments before they are posted.
- **YouTube:** When uploading videos, you should use the option to **NOT** allow public comments on the video.
- **Others:** You will find a wide range of options in terms of being able to allow or not allow public comments. We strongly encourage you not to allow them unless software from IT will allow you to back up your posts as well as public posts. Make sure you have the time to adequately monitor them and ensure compliance with public records and the rules for public comments.
- **Cross-Connecting Accounts to County Website:** Before setting up any social media account to autofeed postings, such as tweets or Facebook notes, to your county webpages ([www.caswellcountync.gov](http://www.caswellcountync.gov)), please contact the IT Director first. This can create technical or content conflicts.

### Account Access & Use

Decide with your supervisor whether to include **your name** in addition to your department/division name in your blog or Twitter accounts and postings. In some cases, you will have **multiple authorized users** posting information from your department. Most likely, if you are managing a Facebook profile, you will register the county email address for the account to create the page/profile and you will likely be an administrator via your personal Facebook page (this eliminates logging in and out between professional and personal accounts). Keep in mind that while there will be some element of activity (reading, browsing) while on your personal site, **you are not authorized to post to your personal page during work hours.** For example, while administering the department page, do not update your personal status, accept friend or page requests, upload your vacation photos, etc. at the same time. As you are likely aware, social media tools, just like email messages, have timestamps. There will be overlap between your personal and professional relationships and you may want to post a quick hello or note to a friend, but....don't do it. Such posting is a violation of this policy.

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### Personal Accounts

Do not use your personal accounts to interact with county or county-related business contacts and never use the county account to interact with personal contacts. Furthermore, do not follow or add pages/profiles that are not work-related. For example, for your work Twitter account, do not follow your favorite celebrity, politician or corporation. Only respected celebrities, approved by the Department Leader, with documented involvement in a related cause, such as diabetes prevention, should be followed. Please see the links below in [Related Resources and Links](#) that outline how the first amendment relates to government employees.

### Passwords

If an employee with access to the account leaves county employment, the department must ensure that passwords are changed immediately. On Facebook, the employee must be removed as an admin for the account. This allows the main county email address used to open the account to remain the same (info@, support@, etc.). The account holder(s) shall be generic rather than specific to the department/division. Passwords generally should be changed periodically for security purposes, as directed by IT.

### Considerations Before Starting an Account

In the interest of time, consider what level of experience and time you and your department/division have available for adding social media to the work you do.

- How much extra work will it be?
- How much will it impact your current work?
- Do you need to utilize all the social media options or would one be more appropriate for your department/division?
- Do you feel comfortable using the social media tool(s) selected? Do you need training or coaching?
- How many staff will be managing the account? Do all of them have the training and judgment to effectively and appropriately manage the account?
- Can you update it regularly? Social media tools are not once-in- a-while projects. You obviously need not post constantly; however, these tools do require regular updates to maintain interest.
- Can you monitor it regularly? Even when you are not posting, the account should be monitored for comments, questions, spam, hacking, etc. Some local governments' social media pages have been hacked or filled with spam for long periods before someone corrected the problem. Or someone may have left inappropriate or vulgar comments on the page that should have been deleted.

### Public Records: Public Comments & Record Retention

Like email, communication via government-related social networking sites is a public record. This means that both the posts of the employee administrator and any feedback by other employees or non-employees, including the public, **become part of the public record** if they are posted on the county's

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social media page. The length of time that the records must be kept varies based on the type of information posted and the rules are this are still evolving through case law.

Account administrators who receive messages through the private message service offered by some social media sites, including direct messages through Twitter, should encourage users to contact the account administrator at a county email address maintained by their department. Any private messages received through a social media account should be treated the same as constituent emails and, therefore, as public records. Account administrators or other authorized staff members should reply using their county government email account whenever possible.

All employees are required to assume responsibility for public records and comply with the retention period under the NC General Statutes. Any department with a social media account should contact IT to set up a site retention schedule and retention system using provided software. **It is important to note that records retention software to back up social media accounts will only work for:** Twitter, Facebook, Flickr, Blogger, Google Docs, Google sites, Google Calendar, Gmail, Google contacts, Picasa, Zoho and LinkedIn. You will have to keep your own backup records of any other types of social media, so we will be more reluctant to approve other accounts unless you have a clear records retention plan in place.

Below is an excerpt written by Frayda Bluestein from the UNC School of Government. While it mentions Facebook, the same would apply for other social media that allow posted messages or comments from the public and such social media would have to follow the same rules:

*You should assume that electronic records you create as part of a government Facebook page are **public record**, since they are created “in connection with the transaction of public business” by your public agency. (See G.S. 132-1). That doesn’t mean, however, that you can’t delete inappropriate messages. Facebook has rules about that, and you can create your own reasonable, viewpoint neutral rules when you set up the pages. There are First Amendment issues that arise when you establish a “forum” for communication, which you essentially do when you allow comments on your page.*

**It is especially important NOT to remove or censor comments simply because they are critical of you, your department, county officials, or any other aspect of county government or because you personally disagree with them.** However, you are allowed to delete inappropriate comments or replies as described in the required disclaimer for all social media accounts set out on the next page, which includes the types of comments that can be deleted. It is very important that you follow these rules closely to avoid the perception of bias in deleting comments due to their viewpoint. See Required Public Rules & Disclaimer on page 4 for a list of comments or posts that may be deleted. Another helpful guide comes from the N.C. Archives and Records, Government Records Branch on best practices for government social networking sites.

[http://www.records.ncdcr.gov/guides/best\\_practices\\_socialmedia\\_usage\\_20091217.pdf](http://www.records.ncdcr.gov/guides/best_practices_socialmedia_usage_20091217.pdf)

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### When in Doubt...

Check with your supervisor or Department Leader before posting information if you are uncertain about its relevancy or accuracy. Do the same if you are uncertain about deleting public comments. You can also check with the Human Resources Director. Social media is very timely and you may experience a delay in getting feedback, but try to be patient. While most people can undo or remove a posting, we don't want to unnecessarily and inadvertently distribute misinformation or create other unintended outcomes.

### Required Public Rules & Disclaimer

Any Caswell County social media accounts **MUST publicly post** the language below as the Public Rules & Disclaimer in a visible location on the main page of your account. **HOWEVER**, if the language below is too long for your social media account, such as the short profiles for Twitter, we have provided links to the full text that you can use with no other option available.

- Link to Social Media Public Rules & Disclaimer: [Insert Link]
- Link to Twitter Account Public Rules & Disclaimer: [Insert Link]

- A. **Public Rules & Disclaimer for All Social Media Accounts (Other Than Twitter):** Post the language below in a visible location on your social media pages or profiles or use the link above if no other visible option.

"The purpose of this site is to provide Caswell County residents and visitors with timely information about     (insert brief summary here)    . Because representatives of Caswell County government communicate through this site, any communications posted on this page, including comments or questions posted by the public may be subject to the North Carolina Public Records law.

We value your comments and questions, but Caswell County may not be able to address all of them through this site. Please visit <http://www.caswellcountync.gov> for contact information on specific issues.

Any communications posted here by someone other than an official representative of Caswell County government is solely the view and opinion of the author, not Caswell County, any members of its staff, or any public official.

Once posted, Caswell County reserves the right to delete public submissions that contain vulgar language, personal attacks of any kind, or offensive comments that target or disparage any group of people because of some shared characteristic. Any comments viewed as threatening, libelous, or harassing are prohibited and subject to deletion. Further, Caswell County also reserves the right to delete comments that contain the following:

- a. Spam, advertising or links to other sites
- b. Content that is clearly off topic and/or disruptive

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- c. The promotion of any illegal activity
- d. Promotions for any particular services, products, or political organizations
- e. Copyrighted or trademarked material
- f. Personal identifications, such as addresses, phone numbers or other personal information

**B. Public Rules & Disclaimer for Twitter Accounts:** Since Twitter does not provide a way to post lengthy information your profile page, you must create a link to the language below posted elsewhere (such as departmental webpage) or use the link provided above to a webpage on the county website.

“The purpose of this Twitter account is to provide Caswell County residents and visitors with timely information about           (insert brief summary here)          . Because representatives of Caswell County government communicate through this site, any communications posted on this page, may be subject to the North Carolina Public Records law, **including direct messages to and from this account.**

We value your comments and questions, but Caswell County may not be able to address all of them through this site. Please visit <http://www.caswellcountync.gov> for contact information on specific issues.

Any communications posted here by someone other than an official representative of Caswell County government is solely the view and opinion of the author, not Caswell County, any members of its staff, or any public officials.”

### Roles

***You have been given authority to post information that is work-related.  
It is a responsibility and a privilege.***

- **IT** – Provides network security and privacy, creates special email address for social media, monitors use of county equipment for social media, and provides technology records retention.
- **County Manager** – Provides final approval of accounts.
- **Department Leader** – Initial approval of accounts, compliance with policy, guidance on postings and deletion of postings as needed. Serves as primary contact person and maintains list of social media pages/profiles/accounts and passwords for their department, monitors and enforces social media policies.
- **Human Resources** – Provides backup guidance on appropriate postings and personnel-related postings.

### Security & Downloads

**Do not download or add applications** to Facebook or other social media accounts that would be considered non-business tools (Farmville, Donate to a Cause, etc.). If you identify a tool or application

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you want to use, such as RSS feed tools, get approval first from IT. This practice reduces the risk of downloading malware, viruses, etc., especially from applications that are not created by the social media site.

You may request software from IT to manage social media accounts (Tweetdeck, UberTwitter, etc.) and other applications that they have pre-approved. Many of these software options are free and they make managing multiple accounts simpler, but some are better than others. They are also designed to reduce work for you. You can create an original blog post or an image from one social media site and it will be posted on each of the ones for which you have accounts (e.g., Facebook to Twitter).

### Use of County Time & Equipment

It is a mutual understanding between you and your supervisor that your time spent on social media will be entirely work-related, including use of county-issued laptops and county-issued mobile phones. Your supervisor and IT will monitor usage periodically. The County Manager or her/his designee has the authority to conduct random audits of social media accounts.

### What I Can and Can't Post

#### Yes

- Useful, factual, pertinent information

#### No

- Religious information
- Politically slanted information or political organization information
- Personal or departmental opinions
- Fundraising for events not associated with Caswell County Government
- Use of copyrighted materials (logos, graphics, music, art, photographs, video or text).
- Images of people without their permission, especially young people (see page 7)
- Inappropriate, defensive, aggressive, and/or threatening response to a negative response from one of your fans/followers.

Certainly, there will be gray areas and you might not be sure if it is okay to post. If any doubt at all, please seek a second opinion from your Department Leader or Human Resources Director.

### Other Posting Commitments:

- **Avoid customer arguments:** People will disagree with the department's views or your personal perspective...or they will criticize services or decisions in some way. It will happen. Do not engage them in a debate or argument about who is right or wrong. Clarify the department's position or points, but do not argue with them in any way.
- **Stick to your area of expertise.** This information is shared with a large audience and will be archived for years. Take the roles & responsibilities seriously.

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- **Be transparent:** Write honestly and always identify yourself. Anonymous postings are not allowed.
- **Stick to the facts:** Stay away from posting anything that is unconfirmed (rumors) or providing facts/figures that you have not verified.
- **Reserve breaking news for other media sources:** If you know of a “hot” news item of interest to the public, do not announce it on social media first. Contact your Department Leader and the Community Relations Director first to see if it should go out as a news release and/or county website first.
- **Consider consequences:** You are sharing public information. Are you willing/able to back up what you say to your supervisor? To elected officials?
- **Never address personnel issues....EVER:** These are protected by state law and you could end up in court. This includes personal or health information, disciplinary actions, and other personnel related issues.

### Tone

In local government we are accustomed to speaking and writing professionally, authoritatively, and officially. Social media tools are conversational. Consider keeping your tone light and engaging but not so casual that you might offend, offer double entendres, or fail to accurately convey your intent or the information. We’re not trying to take the fun away, but just ask that you find a balance to reach your contacts without getting into situations that would lead to controversy or escalate into having to take your account offline. Always use common sense and always feel comfortable asking for a second opinion if you need it.

Keep in mind, too, that you should not veer from ‘county-speak’ in the sense that you are a representative of Caswell County government. As such, no communication should contradict other guidelines and policies already in place. Posts should not include endorsements, opinions, perception of favoritism toward a specific organization or group, political statements, etc.

### Photo or Image Usage

Any photographs or videos using identifiable images of local residents, especially those under age 21, require a signed release form. More information and a sample form can be found at: [www.Caswellinc.org/Index.aspx?page=1486](http://www.Caswellinc.org/Index.aspx?page=1486). The form should be signed by the individual or the parent or guardian of anyone 20 or younger.

If you using photos taken at an event where participants must register in advance, one alternative is to include photo release language in the registration form. However, you must still obtain a signature of the person or the parent/legal guardian if they are under age 21.

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**More about Facebook:**

- All county department pages must be Facebook business/organizational profiles; that is, the account must be a page and not a personal (friend) profile. This means you would have ‘likers’ instead of friends of your Facebook account.
- All Favorite Pages (these are similar to links on a website—These link to other business or organization profiles) must be relevant. Similar to Twitter and who you follow, you must only designate a business or organization profile as a Favorite Page that represents a business or organization with which you work in a professional capacity.
- Facebook allows you to create tabs with links to other pages. This should be used to post the Social Media Public Rules & Disclaimer, but please call attention to it from your initial page.

**Creation of User Accounts on Non-County Social Media:**

County employees and departments should not sign up and post in a county role as a member or user of general public bulletin boards, listservs, etc., especially those open to comments from the public on any topic. Many of these allow anonymous postings with few rules, creating an atmosphere that fosters misinformation and inflammatory conversation. Even if not anonymous, these types of social media are NOT effective options to communicate official county business. **Also, any postings you make where you are identified as a county representative are a public record** and subject to the same rules noted in this policy related to public records retention.

Because of these issues, do not create any account on this type of social media using a county email address, or post county business without prior approval of the Department Leader.

It is important to distinguish the difference here between general public bulletin boards or listservs and those you join for professional reasons or with restricted, identified members, such as a bulletin board for tax professionals, a Facebook page for the National Recyclers Association or a listserv for building inspectors. The social media policy does not apply to those types of membership accounts.

**Content Removal, Account Termination & Employee Violations**

The Department Leader, County Manager, or the Human Resources Director have the right to terminate the account if not managed according to this Policy and the Social Media Agreement. Any employee(s) creating an account identified as a Caswell County account without prior approval from their immediate supervisor and Department Leader and a signed Social Media Agreement Form may be subject to disciplinary action up to and including dismissal. Other violations of this policy by posting inappropriate content and other major violations may be subject to disciplinary actions, including dismissal. In consultation with the Department Leader, the County Manager or Human Resources Director has the right to remove inappropriate content without prior notices to the employee.

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#### Related Resources and Links

- <http://canons.sog.unc.edu/the-first-amendment-and-facebook-rants-a-case-example/>
- <http://sogweb.sog.unc.edu/blogs/localgovt/?p=1970>
- <http://canons.sog.unc.edu/the-first-amendment-and-government-employees/>
- <http://mashable.com/2010/05/18/rules-social-media-engagment/>