



Texas Department of Information Resources
Transforming How Texas Government Serves Texans

Social Media Resource Guide

Texas Department of Information Resources

Updated March 2023

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Social Media Strategy	2
Social Media Guidelines.....	7
Social Media Content.....	13

Introduction

In 2012, the Texas Department of Information Resources (DIR) collaborated with thirty-four state agencies and institutions of higher education (referred to as “agencies”) to develop a resource guide regarding the use of social media tools for official state business.

This guide has been recently updated in 2023. There are three sections in the Social Media Resource Guide (Resource Guide). Each section includes practical guidance to help agencies successfully implement interactive, web-based communications with customers:

- Social Media Strategy – what to do before creating a social media account.
- Social Media Guidelines – how to stay compliant with existing rules, statutes and policies.
- Social Media Content – how to create valuable content for customers.

The Resource Guide presents recommendations and guidelines, not formal requirements for agencies in their use of social media. Given the variation across agencies in terms of missions, customers, organizational structures, size, and resources, not all sections in the Resource Guide may apply to every agency. If you have comments or suggestions to help improve the Resource Guide or if there are areas in need of an update, please contact outreach@dir.texas.gov.

Why Social Media?

Citizens, businesses, news outlets, and those deeply involved in civic, political, military, and educational service are increasingly interacting with social media tools. Blogs and micro blogs, video, online communities, and other social networking outlets are now a primary information and communications source for a growing segment of the population.

Benefits of Social Media

There are several tangible benefits of using social media. Through appropriate use of social media, agencies have:

- Increased traffic to websites and adoption of online services.
- Communication with the public in a faster and affordable manner.
- Promoted information that would not have reached the public through traditional channels.
- Provided a moderated forum for citizens to constructively discuss critical issues.
- Turned negative complaints into positive experiences with timely customer service.
- Increased outreach and brand recognition to stakeholders.

Who Developed this Guide?

The Social Media Resource Guide is a collaborative project developed by a workgroup comprising of numerous Texas state agencies and institutions of higher education. Members of the workgroup represented a diverse collection of subject-matter areas:

- Communications
- Web development
- Accessibility
- Records management
- Legal
- Marketing/business development
- Security
- Privacy
- Human resources

DIR would like to thank the following agencies for their participation in the development of the Social Media Resource Guide:

- Employees Retirement System of Texas
- Office of Consumer Credit Commissioner
- Office of Injured Employee Counsel
- Office of the Governor
- Railroad Commission of Texas
- Stephen F. Austin State University
- Sunset Advisory Commission
- Teachers Retirement System of Texas
- Texas A&M University
- Texas Alcohol and Beverage Commission
- Texas Animal Health Commission
- Texas Commission on Environmental Quality
- Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts
- Texas Department of Aging and Disability Services
- Texas Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services
- Texas Department of Family and Protective Services
- Texas Department of Insurance
- Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation
- Texas Department of Motor Vehicles
- Texas Department of Public Safety
- Texas Department of State Health Services
- Texas Health and Human Services Commission
- Texas Lottery Commission
- Texas Office of Court Administration
- Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired
- Texas State Library and Archives Commission
- Texas State University
- Texas Water Development Board
- Texas Workforce Commission
- Texas Juvenile Justice Commission
- Texas.gov
- University of Houston
- University of North Texas
- University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio

Social Media Strategy

Social Media Begins with Strategy

As is the case with any project, the likelihood of success increases significantly when an organization starts with a focused strategy with expected or desired outcomes. Social media presents various challenges not found with traditional information technology or communication projects, including the following:

- The variety of affected topics, such as web, communications, legal, accessibility, security, privacy, human resources, and record management.
- The rapidly evolving nature of the industry.
- A certain lack of control over engagements with the public.
- The lack of federal and state laws providing direct regulation of the medium.

Despite these challenges, one point remains clear: DIR sees value in social media and encourages agencies to evaluate social media applications for opportunities to support program goals. Before an agency enters social media, many business considerations and strategic planning elements must be addressed to increase the likelihood of success.

Although there are agencies that have successfully used social media without a well-documented strategy, there are increased risks with this approach. Some of those risks include:

- Not knowing how to respond to certain types of posts or inquiries.
- Inadvertent posting of ill-advised content.
- Inconsistent internal processes or lack of governance.

- Lack of coordination across business areas.
- Expending considerable time and effort with little return.
- Loss of institutional knowledge when critical employees change.

A well-planned social media strategy not only mitigates these risks but provides the agency a roadmap toward continued growth and success.

Start Small

If an organization does not have a social media subject-matter expert, invest time to learn the basics:

- Study the activities and approaches of other similarly situated agencies, both in Texas and other states
- Look around social media sites to learn the culture, appropriate behavior, best practices, etc.

Chances are that some agency employees are familiar with social media through personal use. Look for expertise not only from staff members who handle complementary subject matter (the communication expert, marketing manager, security officer, or web developer), but from others across the agency. Send out an agency-wide communication asking proficient users for input; some may emerge from less likely areas. While social media for personal use is applied differently than for official agency use, these experts could be valuable in helping an organization appreciate the basic language and culture of various social media sites. Experienced users can help an agency successfully navigate specific social media environments to reach an intended audience.

Popular Social Media Sites

Which social media sites should an agency use? The answer depends on the social media goals, which again, should be tied to an agency’s strategy. The table below outlines plausible agency social media goals and the tools best suited to achieving those goals. Details about social media goals and strategies are discussed in the next section.

Goal	Twitter	Facebook	YouTube	LinkedIn
Improve customer service	High	High	Low	Medium
Supplement content to official agency website	Medium	Medium	Medium	Low
Solicit and gather feedback	Medium	High	Low	High
Keep customers informed of the latest news and events	High	High	Medium	High
Educate customers about how to perform certain technical tasks	Low	Low	High	Low
Recruit and retain staff	High	High	Medium	High

Develop the Business Case

The first step in creating a social media strategy is to develop a business case. There is no one-size-fits-all solution that will work for every organization. A small regulatory agency for a highly specialized profession will use social media differently than a large public university with 30,000 students.

Developing a business case will help agencies optimize their social media presence. At a minimum, a business case should address:

- How strategy aligns with existing agency mission
- Program goals, objectives, and performance measures
- Roles and responsibilities
- Internal governance of the social media program
- Costs, including staff resources.

Align with the Mission

Social media applications are communication tools. A strategic, structured approach to social media should be aligned with the agency or program mission and consistent with other agency communication efforts, such as web, print materials, media outreach, and press releases.

The mission statement of an agency or program area naturally drives the content for its communications. For social media, it is a matter of determining how the highly interactive, timely, informal, and engaging content will also support the agency's mission. Keeping the mission in mind helps the agency stay focused in its social media efforts.

Develop Goals

Agencies using social media should have targeted goals that align with their business needs. Understand the mission, related goals, and the types of messages already used. Next, develop new message content and identify the audiences targeted to determine the specific use for social media.

Measure Success

Once goals are identified, agencies should establish performance measures to gauge results of the agency's social media strategy. Without continued evaluation and assessment, it is difficult to indicate if goals are being met.

Many social media sites have simple measurements such as:

- YouTube page views
- Number of Facebook fans
- Number of Twitter + LinkedIn followers

While these numbers may provide objective measurements on the use of social media tools, they alone might not be sufficient to determine the overall value of your agency's social media strategy. Measurements need to be specifically and directly tied to an agency's social media goals.

Here are some examples of specific metrics or performance measures that can more accurately determine success. The key to establishing useful performance measures is that they tie to an outcome that is outside the social media efforts.

- Decreased volume in other contact channels such as call center or email inquiries.
- Increased traffic to an agency website—many agency website analytics can record whether a visit came from a particular social media website.
- Increased participation at agency-sponsored activities
- Increased numbers of people applying for a particular service

Building up an agency's social media presence to have this kind of impact takes time. Unless the agency is a well-known brand with a large audience (e.g., The University of Texas, TxDOT, or DPS), it

will take time to build a community that can be influenced to act through social media efforts. Moreover, to ensure initial and ongoing success, an agency must establish performance measures that will allow for the monitoring of an agency’s social media strategy and allow for adjustments, as necessary.

Correlating social media efforts to real world behavior is not simple, especially if the social media activity is limited to a third-party’s website. However, if some of the activity is integrated into the agency’s own website, there may be additional tools to help analyze and quantify the impact of each social media posting.

Roles and Responsibilities

Planning and executing a social media strategy involves different players assuming various roles. Here are some key roles in developing, implementing, and growing a social media initiative.

Role	Descriptions
Executive Sponsor	Social media strategies and activity should have executive approval. The sponsor may also lead a workgroup to develop internal policies, procedures, and other matters related to governance. The sponsor also helps to ensure goals are tied to the agency’s mission.
Accessibility Coordinator	The Accessibility Coordinator ensures the electronic information resources are accessible to all internal and external users. Accessibility is not only for public-facing social media applications, but also for all internal applications, regardless of the abilities of internal users. Texas state agencies and institutions of higher education are bound by 1 TAC 206 and 1 TAC 213 . Refer to the Accessibility section in the Social Media Guidelines for how these rules apply to social media.
Communications or Outreach Specialist	As described earlier, social media strategy must be aligned with the agency’s mission. The communications specialist might also develop and/or coordinate a plan for promoting the social media sites.
Policy/Legal Counsel	Legal counsel helps to ensure compliance with contracts, laws, rules, and policies. Involve the legal team in every step of the process. Make sure that activities are consistent with agency policy and state and federal laws.
Records Manager	The Records Manager determines the responsibility regarding retention of social media content. Currently, there is no statewide retention schedule specifically addressing social media records. Each agency must

	determine how it will comply with general state record management requirements. See the Records Retention Section of the Social Media Guidelines for more details.
Social Media Activity Monitor	Many social media applications allow for comments, oftentimes in an uncontrolled environment. Agencies should periodically monitor to ensure customer needs are being met and social media initiatives are achieving the desired engagement.
Content Manager/Director	The Content Manager/Director determines what type of content is appropriate based on a unified social media strategy. See the Content Section of the Social Media Resource Guide for examples.
Content Writers/Sources	These are agency staff who help supply the content. Sourcing content directly from program areas ensures content is relevant, accurate, and up to date. These personnel also notify the program area that it will be featured in an upcoming post.
Technical Support/ Other Subject-Matter Experts	Since social media touches so many subjects, a technical expert is crucial to ensure compliance and interpret the application of policy. For example, a Human Resources specialist may develop employee use policies; security personnel will guide the application of security policy and guidelines to social media; technology support staff will approve social media management software and manage access to third-party sites for employees.

Governance

Gain Executive Buy-In

Social media initiatives should not be made and implemented in a vacuum; there should be an organized effort that includes executive management. There have been cases in both the public and private sectors where employees have launched social media accounts without using proper administrative approval, leading to inaccurate or unauthorized representation, improper customer engagement, employee discipline, and occasional legal actions.

It is impossible to implement a successful and sustainable social media program without the approval from executive management. Propose the social media strategy and the overall business case to executive management to solicit commitment to using social media as an official communication channel.

Here are some topics to cover during a social media presentation with executives. Be specific and provide examples of the following to support your message:

- Demonstrate current knowledge of the industry.
- Gain support from internal subject-matter experts in the areas of accessibility, records management, security, human resources, etc.
- Identify goals and measures that will benefit the agency and present its value.
- Outline how the agency will mitigate potential risks in an uncontrolled environment (especially dealing with negative content)
- Get legal counsel involved early and show how social media efforts will comply with existing laws, rules, and regulations.
- Show value demonstrated by other Texas agencies or similar agencies in other states.
- Propose a detailed plan for initiation, maintenance, and growth.

Start a Workgroup

Due to the various subject-matter experts that need to be involved, many agencies establish workgroups to develop a social media strategy.

While the main purpose of the workgroup is to ensure your agency's social media strategy accomplishes its goals, the following topics are essential elements for a workgroup to consider:

- How to develop and approve content before it gets posted
- Guidelines for when, how, and in what timeframes to respond to inquiries.
- How much time to spend managing the social media applications.
- How to manage the account after work hours
- Which employees will have access to post and by what devices?
- When to explore new social media tools
- Who to connect to or follow.
- Whether and how employees may engage through their personal accounts
- How to train and keep employees updated on the latest industry developments

Stay Current

It is important to stay current on the ever-evolving social media landscape, not for the purpose of engaging every new social media site available, but to stay ahead on the latest developments in the industry and enhance the skills needed to use evolving tools.

Social Media Guidelines

Definitions

Social Media Tool

A software system or service provided via the Internet used to communicate and share information between people, especially affinity groups of people such as customers or constituents, where customers, constituents, or the public are the primary creators of the information content. Examples include Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Flickr.

Internal Social Media Tool

A Social Media Tool that is owned, funded, or operated by or for a state agency. Internal Social Media Tools are considered “state websites” and must follow all requirements of 1 TAC 206. Examples include agency-hosted or externally hosted and agency-dedicated instances of wikis, blogs, and learning management systems.

External Social Media Tool

A Social Media Tool built, owned, funded or operated by a commercial enterprise or nonprofit consortium that is intended for widespread use in a variety of contexts by the public users. Examples include Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Flickr

Public Social Media Policy

A public-facing document published by an agency that notifies the public of the policy areas that impact the public's use of agency Social Media Tools.

Accessibility

Usability of a product, service, environment, or facility by people with the widest range of capabilities.

Personally Identifiable Information

Personally identifiable information is defined in [Texas Business and Commerce Code \(TBCC\) Chapter 521](#) as “Information that alone or in conjunction with other information identifies an individual.”

This includes an individual's:

- (a) name, social security number, date of birth, or government-issued identification number.
- (b) mother's maiden name.
- (c) unique biometric data including the individual's fingerprint, voice print, or retina or iris image.
- (d) unique electronic identification number, address, or routing code; and
- (e) telecommunication access device as defined by Section 32.51, Penal Code.

Sensitive Personal Information

There are two categories of sensitive personal information defined in [Texas Business and Commerce Code \(TBCC\) Chapter 521](#):

- (a) an individual's first name or first initial and last name in combination with any one or more of the following items:
 - (1) social security number
 - (2) driver's license number or government-issued identification number; or
 - (3) account number or credit or debit card number in combination with any required security code, access code, or password that would permit access to an individual's financial account; or
- (b) information that identifies an individual and relates to
 - (1) the physical or mental health or condition of the individual
 - (2) the provision of health care to the individual; or
 - (3) payment for the provision of health care to the individual.

Purpose

The purpose of the Social Media Guidelines is to provide guidance for agencies and institutions of higher education regarding the use of Social Media Tools for official state business. These guidelines serve as a compendium of state law, Texas Administrative Code (TAC), and federal law that apply to the use of social media by Texas agencies. Although there is currently no Texas Administrative Rule that directly addresses the use of social media, there are existing rules associated with electronic information resources (EIR) that may affect the use of Social Media Tools by state agencies.

While agencies are required to comply with established rules and laws (as is indicated throughout document as “must”); this document contains additional guidance and best practices, by which compliance is encouraged by the Department of Information Resources (DIR) to maximize the benefit of social media while minimizing risk to the state (as is indicated by “should”).

This document is not meant to replace current agency-specific social media policies, strategies, or guidelines; but rather, the document should be used as a reference and where appropriate, supplement an agency’s current social media policy.

DIR collaborated with subject-matter experts from agencies throughout the state to produce these guidelines. Due to the evolving nature of social media, the content in this document may require periodic updates. If you have suggestions for this document, contact outreach@dir.texas.gov.

Scope

The guidelines apply to the use of social media for conducting official state business by Texas state agencies and institutions of higher education. The scope of the guidelines does not govern an employee’s personal use of social media. Policies regarding an employee’s personal use of social media are monitored by each agency’s human resource policies.

For the purpose of these guidelines, a Social Media Tool includes both tools deployed and operated by an agency (Internal Social Media Tool) and official agency social media web pages hosted on a third-party website (External Social Media Tool).

In 1 TAC 206: State Websites, a state website is defined as a “website that is connected to the Internet and is owned, funded, or operated by or for a state agency or institution of higher education, including key public entry points.” While an External Social Media Tool developed and hosted by a third party is not within the scope of 1 TAC 206, an Internal Social Media Tool must adhere to 1 TAC 206. External Social Media Tools should adhere to the requirements of 1 TAC 206 to the extent possible.

Policy Considerations

The decision to use Social Media Tools is a business decision based on an agency’s specific needs and the appropriate scope of its use.

Certain sections in the Social Media Guidelines are internal to an agency (such as Security and Employee Use) while other sections should be communicated to the public. An agency should publish a public-facing document (Public Social Media Policy) that notifies the public of the policy areas that impact the public’s use of agency Social Media Tools. At a minimum, the Public Social Media Policy should address the following:

- Privacy notification
- Moderation policy
- Linking policy

- Public Information Act (Public Information Act, Texas Government Code Chapter 552)
- Third-party website policy
- Intellectual property rights and ownership

The agency's Public Social Media Policy should be available within the Social Media Tool, if possible, or on the agency's official website.

Accessibility

Agencies have a legal responsibility to ensure that all electronic and information resources are accessible and usable by people with the widest range of capabilities possible.

1 TAC 206 and 1 TAC 213 describe requirements regarding accessibility of state websites and all agency EIR. External Social Media Tools may or may not be compliant to 1 TAC 206/213; however, it is the agency's responsibility to ensure that agency content is fully accessible. An agency should provide links to the external social media accessibility policies, make a good faith effort to remediate accessibility concerns for those websites, and gravitate to websites that respect EIR accessibility concerns. It is the agency's responsibility to ensure social media content is fully accessible.

Accessibility requirements apply to the content on the Social Media Tool, not the features of the tool. Therefore, if an agency does not use an inaccessible feature, it is not in violation of accessibility requirements. If an agency uses an inaccessible feature, it should employ the following or similar alternatives to ensure full compliance with the law:

- Contact the social media provider to address accessibility issues.
- Provide access to duplicated social media content on an accessible communication channel.
- Direct users to an alternate version of the Social Media Tool that will provide accessible content.

If the agency cannot implement a reasonable alternative solution and a business need to post inaccessible content remains, an exception must be obtained in accordance with 1 TAC 213. Exceptions still require the provision of an alternate method (for example, a toll-free number or a hard copy).

Privacy

Only public information may be published on social media websites. To protect a citizen's privacy, the agency's Public Social Media Policy should instruct the public to exclude Personally Identifiable Information, Sensitive Personal Information, and any other personal information protected by law from social media communications.

For information regarding the difference between Personally Identifiable Information and Sensitive Personal Information, refer to the Definitions section.

There may be instances when Personally Identifiable Information is needed to serve the public. If appropriate, agencies should provide an alternate means of communication for the public to continue the conversation in a protected environment. An agency should define when Personally Identifiable Information will be deleted.

If Sensitive Personal Information or other confidential information is posted, the agency must remove it as soon as possible upon discovery. If the agency chooses to provide an explanation for the removal, the agency should reference the relevant section in its Public Social Media Policy. Other federal laws, rules and regulations may apply.

Open Records Requests

Open Records requests under the Texas Public Information Act for social media content must follow the agency's Open Records (or "Public Information") Requests Policy.

Records Retention

Content posted by the agency or the public on an agency's social media website is a state record (Government Code, Section 441.180(11)), and is subject to [State Records Retention](#) requirements in Government Code Chapter 441, Subchapter L, 441.180-205.

To manage compliance, agencies may consider common exceptions to State Records Retention Requirements in developing social media content strategy. Two common exceptions are:

- **Duplicate content**, which is content that is duplicated from another source. (Government Code, Section 441.180(11))
- **Transitory information** is a record of "temporary usefulness that are not an integral part of a records series of an agency, that are not regularly filed within an agency's recordkeeping system, and that are required only for a limited period of time for the completion of an action by an official or employee of the agency or in the preparation of an on-going records series." (13 TAC 6.10 and 13 TAC 6.91(8))

An agency may be prohibited from deleting social media records, regardless of its established records retention policy, if the record is the subject of legal claims or actions (Government Code, Section 441.187). In addition, state and federal courts require the preservation of relevant records if a judicial or administrative action is reasonably foreseeable, even if such action is not yet initiated.

Security

In its usage of social media, an agency must comply with its own IT security policies, standards, and guidelines.

Third-Party Website Policies and Terms of Service

Before creating an account with a Social Media Tool, an agency should review and accept the provider's terms of service. The decision to accept a provider's terms of service is the responsibility of each agency—the state does not accept the terms on behalf of all state agencies. Each agency should review these terms and determine whether the risks stemming from the provider's terms are acceptable.

Agencies may negotiate with a social media provider directly to obtain agency-specific terms of service. If an agency can negotiate more favorable terms, please notify outreach@dir.texas.gov.

If possible, an agency will inform users that the External Social Media Tool is hosted by a third party and the use of the website is governed by the social media provider's own policies and by any additional policies as set forth by the agency or institution.

There is currently a nationwide effort led by the National Association of State Chief Information Officers (NASCIO) to negotiate a state and local government-specific terms of service with several popular social media providers. To date, Facebook has negotiated a term of service for [state and local government entities](#).

YouTube has also agreed to terms for state government but requires an application process through the State Chief Information Officer. Contact outreach@dir.texas.gov for more information.

Moderation and Monitoring

If an agency allows public comments, then such content should be monitored regularly by the agency; however, the means and frequency by which an agency monitors its social media content is determined by the agency. Monitoring may be active or passive at the agency's discretion.

If an agency chooses to monitor, it is the agency's responsibility to determine the extent of moderation. There may be instances where an agency chooses to moderate posted content by deleting all or part of a post. The extent to which an agency limits or restricts speech requires careful consideration, including the application of the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. The criteria for removing, rejecting, or disavowing public content should be determined by each agency and communicated to the public in its Public Social Media Policy.

An agency is not required to provide an explanation for removing content but may choose to do so. Removal of content does not preclude retention based on an agency's records retention policy.

Intellectual Property Rights and Ownership

Social media content may sometimes include photographs, audio, or video. An agency must ensure that it has the right to post all social media content and is not infringing on the intellectual property rights of others. Due to the functional nature of certain Social Media Tools, such as Twitter "retweet" or Facebook "share" automatically provides attribution to the original post. [1 TAC 206.54\(1\)](#) provides rules regarding the "copying and use of information by website owners linking to state agency sites." Adherence to this rule will ensure an agency is compliant with requirements related to intellectual property rights and ownership.

Intellectual property rights of content provided by the public will be governed by federal copyright law, the terms of service of the social media provider, and the agency's copyright policies.

The Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA) provides for a limitation of liability for alleged copyright infringement. To comply with the Online Copyright Infringement Liability Limitation Act of the Digital Millennium Copyright Act, agencies must include a notice of policy and contact information for its appointed copyright agent.

Employee Use

This section addresses agency employees' use of social media in connection with their agency position or as a part of their official job duties. When using social media in any fashion connected to their agency position or job duties, and when presenting oneself in a social media setting as an agency representative, agency employees must comply with applicable agency policies governing employee behavior and acceptable use of electronic and information resources.

All information posted on agency Social Media Tools by an employee under the above-described conditions should adhere to the agency's professional conduct and employee ethics policies.

Linking

1 TAC 206 outlines the policies for linking to and from state agency websites, including Private Social Media Tools. Although Public Social Media Tools are not state websites, agencies are encouraged to adhere to 1 TAC 206 on their social media websites, when possible.

An agency should disclose a public-facing Linking Policy that extends to agency content on Social Media Tools.

References

- [Texas Administrative Code, Title 1, Chapter 206](#)
- [Texas Administrative Code, Title 1, Chapter 213](#)
- [Texas Business and Commerce Code, Chapter 521](#)
- [Texas Government Code, Chapter 441, Subchapter L, 441.180-205](#)
- [Texas Government Code, 441.180 \(11\)](#)
- [Texas Government Code, 441.187](#)
- [Public Information Act, Government Code Chapter 552](#)
- [Copyright Act of 1976 \(Including the Digital Millennium Copyright Act\)](#)

Social Media Content

Once an agency determines its social media strategy and adopts a comprehensive policy, the agency is ready to begin posting to social media channels. Sharing content using social media should support the agency's mission, fit within the overall communications, and outreach plan.

Despite the criticality of a social media strategy and policy, it is the agency's ability to continually produce engaging, interesting, and relevant content to its audience that determines the success of the agency's efforts.

Social media is like other channels of communication and there are varying degrees to which social media content ties back to overall communications content:

- Direct repetition of existing communications
- Support and augment existing communications.
- Original content related to communications strategy, such as
 - an opinion on a critical issue
 - external articles that relate to business lines or program areas
 - fun or informal content to engage the audience.

Internal Considerations

Before using social media, an agency should determine how it will create and maintain content. Consider questions like the ones below to determine the approach to creating and maintaining content.

- Who is the audience?

Many agencies have multiple divisions that serve a variety of customers. Does the agency want to focus on a specific segment, or take a broader approach that communicates with diverse stakeholders? See the Account Management section in the Social Media Strategy.

- How frequently does the audience need to be reached to communicate the agency's message? Consider seasonal activity, program schedules, initiatives, outreach campaigns, legislative calendar, etc.
- Is there an "expiration date" for the message?

If so, plan to remove or replace it. Proactively manage date-sensitive content.

- Does the agency expect an important level of engagement from its audience?

Be prepared with responses and time to participate in the conversation.

- Who will monitor comments and responses?
 - Identify key personnel who will assist in monitoring comments and drafting responses.
 - Identify personnel authorized to respond.
 - Evaluate comments/responses to develop latest content or manage current content.
- How does the agency manage social media functions during off hours?

Emergencies and other important social media conversations may occur after business hours, so it is important to work out processes in advance.

- Does the agency want employees to join in conversations from their personal accounts?

If so, make it clear within the agency what is acceptable and what is not. Sometimes, employee contributions in non-official roles can be more beneficial than what the official agency representative can say.

- How does the agency reuse content across platforms?

Determine how content will need to be tailored for each social media tool. Not all social media platforms are created equal. There may be a need to format content differently to keep it relevant across platforms and meet the various audiences' expectations.

Agency Collaboration

Social media is social by nature and as such, agencies can benefit by creating their own social media network of similar agencies.

- Integrate with other state and local agencies.
 - Identify agencies with similar responsibilities, target audiences, or communication goals and share or augment their social media communications. Example: Public Utility Commission, Office of Public Utility Counsel, State Energy Conservation Office, and Railroad Commission all have interest in energy production and consumption.
 - Work together with similar agencies. Find out how similar agencies manage their social media content and work together to share the messages. Example: Texas Department of Transportation, Department of Public Safety, Governor's Office, and cities all have a role during hurricane season announcements and public safety.
- If an agency's mission is sometimes confused with that of another, establish a standard way to direct users to the proper agency.
 - It can be frustrating for the public to have their questions or concerns go unanswered because they reached the wrong agency or program area. Work with stakeholder agencies to produce standard responses so the public is quickly pointed in the right direction.
 - If the user has a major complaint, consider giving the agency a courtesy call to provide context for the user's comments or complaints.
- Identify agencies with less obvious similarities, but whose messages are also of interest to your agency's target audiences. Example: when it comes to long term financial and wellness planning, the Employees Retirement System of Texas and the Department of Aging and Disability Services might share similar interests and customers.
- When possible, keep track of other agencies' social media accounts to stay informed of updates and review for potential content ideas.
- There may be times when citizens ask about a program or division from a different agency. Instead of telling them they have the wrong agency, try to redirect them to the right place.

Types of Messages

Social media content can take many forms depending on the audience, message, and social media tool. This section provides an overview of the different types of messages. What each agency decides to use will depend on its social media strategies and communications plan.

Push vs. Pull Messages

Consider when and where the agency will use **push vs. pull messaging**. Well-rounded social media content will include both types of messages.

- Pushing information out to the audience by distributing information, announcing updates, providing details, etc.
- Pulling responses from the audience through surveys, polls, requests for feedback, etc.

Responses to Comments

Plan a strategy to **respond to comments**. Here are some things to consider:

- **Tone** – Decide what kind of tone to use on each social media site. Is it okay to be informal, playful, or witty? When should the message be serious and formal?
- **Source** – Cite any needed sources and include necessary links. When promoting links from other organizations, think about the perception of endorsing those websites. Even if the content is neutral, the appearance could still give a negative or misleading impression. Refer to the Linking section in the Social Media Guidelines for more detail. Examples of possible misleading perceptions include:
 - an article from a private company can be perceived as an endorsement, even if the article is neutral.
 - an article that contains a criticism of an organization, project, or product may be perceived as an agreement to the assessment, even if it is not the main subject of the article.
 - an article from a website with affiliations (political, religious, etc.) might be perceived as an endorsement of the affiliation, even if the content of the article is neutral.
- **Governance** – Given the agency's staff and resources, how does the agency social media contact involve other agency staff to provide the most accurate responses? How soon can the agency respond and what is the process for approving the response?

Negative Posts

Consider when and how the agency will respond to **negative comments and experiences** regarding the agency.

- Remember that people have a right to express their opinions.
- Negative comments might not require a response; however, it may be in the agency's best interest to correct facts or address a negative experience. This positive interaction can improve the agency's relationship with citizens.
- Remember, it is critical to have a public social media policy to establish guidelines for public comments and criteria for removing content/comments. Details are in the Moderation and Monitoring section of the Social Media Guidelines.
- Monitor the comments. Is the post bashing and degrading others? If the conversation is getting out of control, consider replying with the agency's policy regarding content. In extreme cases, consider deleting the post.
- Is the post ranting, joking, or satirical? Depending on the degree of offense, reply with the

agency's content policy and/or delete the post.

- Is the post misguided? Does it present false information? Respond to incorrect statements with facts and consider offering offline contact information such as a telephone number, email address, or link to information on the agency's website.
- Is the post a result of a negative experience? Monitor the experience and consider responding to rectify the situation and offer a solution.
- Before removing posts, make sure the agency has a clear records retention policy for social media content. If the social media discussion could lead to a legal action, check with your legal counsel before deleting anything. Check the Records Retention section in the Social Media Guidelines.

Planned vs. Spontaneous Content

When possible, agencies should plan posts in advance. Scheduling posts in advance is a great way for the agency to ensure it is producing fresh, up-to-date content that aligns with other communication channels. Advance planning reduces the stress of last-minute scrambles for content. Browse through agency calendars, events, and other agency-wide outlets to find material from a broad range of agency-related topics.

When there is a need to provide spontaneous content, it is important to have an established approval process to make sure the content is reviewed and verified in a timely manner. Instances may include:

- posting at a meeting, conference or other event in real time
- emergency or another unforeseen situation
- quick response to an inquiry or comment
- unexpected breaking news

Other Considerations

Make sure the agency Records Retention Policy addresses what needs to be retained for pull messages before gathering response from the audience. If the messages are transitory in nature, then the agency is not explicitly required to retain them. However, if the agency uses the information collected to conduct official agency business, such as making policy decisions, then the agency must have a schedule and a mechanism for retaining, reproducing, and disposing of this content. For more detail, refer to the Records Retention section in the Social Media Guidelines.

Also, legislation requires that electronic resources be accessible to persons with disabilities. If the content pulled from the audience is unique and not duplicated in any other agency communication, agencies must ensure these pull messages are compliant with accessibility requirements. For more detail, refer to the Accessibility section in the Social Media Guidelines.