



## **Social Media Policy**

### **Overview**

The City of Grand Rapids intends to use social media websites as additional communication channels to help promote its programs, events, and services, and represent itself appropriately and consistently on the Internet. Social media technology is an effective medium for the City to distribute news of an event quickly and will not be used as a forum for public discussion.

A social media presence is yet another way government can communicate to the broadest possible audience of those it serves. The City of Grand Rapids' intent is to increase transparency, immediacy, and feedback to the community and to address the fast-changing landscape of the Internet and the way residents obtain information online.

The best, most appropriate, City of Grand Rapids uses of social media tools fall into two categories:

- Channels to supplement information from other City communications sources, such as the website, and draw more eyes back to those communication sources, and to broadcast the City's messages to the widest possible audience
- Channels for disseminating time-sensitive information as quickly as possible (i.e. emergency information)

### **General Technicalities**

All City of Grand Rapids social media pages will adhere to the content standards below.

- The City has a "page" in Facebook, not a "group." Facebook pages offer distinct advantages, including greater visibility, customization, and measurability.
- The type of page is "government."
- The City's web team will standardize and provide all City Facebook page displays to include the City logo and other pertinent information.
- Any City Facebook page will be based on a template that includes consistent City branding and style. The web team will provide departments with the template.
- Departments will use proper grammar and standard AP style, avoiding jargon and abbreviations. Facebook is more casual than most other communications tools but still represents the City at all times.

- An application shall not be used unless it serves a business purpose, adds to the user experience, comes from a trusted source, and is approved by the IT Director, or City Administrator.
- All new social media tools proposed for City use will be approved by the City Administrator, IT Director, or the appropriate Department Head.
- Employees representing the City of Grand Rapids on the City's social media sites must conduct themselves professionally at all times as representatives of the City.
- Elected officials should comply with the guidelines outlined in the City's Technology, Communications, and Social Media Policies.

### **Social Media Administrators**

A successful social media page requires monitoring. Each City department shall appoint one or two of its staff as the assigned administrator(s) (AA), who will be responsible for monitoring the social page. Posts shall be approved by the AA or a designated alternate.

Posts and monitoring shall be done during office hours, with the exception of emergency situations.

**AFTER HOURS:** In the event of an emergency need for an after-hours posting, designated communications department staff shall be contacted to post information on the City's website followed by social media.

### **Employee Access to Social Media Sites**

Designated AA employees are allowed to use personal logins/accounts to access social media sites as part of their work duties. Use of personal mobile devices and access of personal social media sites should be minimal while at work in accordance with the Personnel Policy Manual. Authorization during work time is for the expressed purpose of allowing social media editors to conduct their work.

Social media accounts are considered a city asset, and logins to those accounts must be securely administered in accordance with City technology policies

## **City's Social Media Posts**

### **Accuracy and Timeliness**

The City of Grand Rapids will make every effort to ensure the accuracy of the information provided on its social media pages. However, several factors that are beyond the City control (including unauthorized modification of electronic data, transmission errors, browser incompatibilities, information that has been cached on the local computer or storage device, or other aspects of electronic communication in an evolving and time-sensitive environment) can affect the quality of the information displayed on the site.

For that reason, the City does not guarantee the accuracy of the information provided on its social media page and is not liable for reliance on this information.

The City's timeliness of posts may also vary based on staff availability.

Therefore, a disclaimer shall be posted on any social media site, stating:

*This social media page is intended to get information out to a wide number of people quickly, not as an in-depth or complete source of information, but as an evolving supplement to the City of Grand Rapids' website ([www.cityofgrandrapidsmn.com](http://www.cityofgrandrapidsmn.com)), newsletter, press releases, and in-person communications. Staff will post within office hours (Monday- Friday, 8 am-4:30 pm) and within the varying perimeters of staff availability.*

### **Data Practices Concerns**

Any content maintained in a social media format that is related to City business, including a list of subscribers, is a public record. The department maintaining the site is responsible for responding completely and accurately to any public records request for public records on social media. Content related to City business shall be maintained in an accessible format so that it can be produced in response to a request.

Content posted to social media sites will be transitory in nature, in order to adhere to the City's records retention policy. All posts to social media sites will be discarded after three months of viewing.

A social media account shall not be used by the City or any City employee or representative to disclose private, confidential, and non-public information.

### **Employee Conduct**

All City employees have a responsibility to help communicate accurate and timely information to the public in a professional manner. When using social media, City employees must follow all policies outlined here and in the Personnel Policy Manual.

Social media platforms provide new ways to engage with citizens and customers to build stronger relationships, civic engagement, and "connectedness." Employees designated to participate in social media are expected to follow these principles:

- Postings shall be related to that department's specific function and subject matter expertise.
- Postings shall be factual, respectful, on-point, and reasonably avoid being thought of as spam, off-topic, or offensive.
- Per the City's communications policy (see applicable section of the Personnel Policy Manual), employees must notify the City's Communications department of any media contacts received related to their posts. Further, under no circumstances shall non-department head personnel comment to reporters regarding matters of City policy, opinion, or interpretation.
- Employees shall not use the City's social media sites to copy or transmit any documents, images, software, or other information protected by a copyright owned by someone or an entity other than the City of Grand Rapids without proper authorization from the copyright owner. Copyright protection applies to any document, image, software or information unless it is specifically marked as public, not copyrighted, or freeware. In the absence of any specific copyright markings, material or information should be assumed

to be copyright-protected. It is the employee's responsibility to obtain proper authorization from the copyright owner before using the electronic communications system to copy or transmit original copyrighted material.

- City social media sites or equipment may not be used by staff as a platform to share personal opinions or for political purposes, private business or charitable activities, commercial or personal transactions, promotion of religious views, or for any other purpose prohibited by law.
- Replies to individual constituent inquiries received via social media sites must be retained per the City's record retention schedule.
- Decisions to remove posts that violate the City's social media policy shall be made by the appropriate department head, or the City Administrator. Employees monitoring City social media pages must bring questionable posts to the attention of their department head or the City Administrator immediately.
- Employees who are asked by organizations to post information on the City's social media sites shall refer the request to the City Administrator, or the appropriate Department Head.

### **Guidelines for Personal Communications**

While every individual has a right to speak out on the issues facing the community, state, and nation, employees must take great care to make it clear that their personal opinions are their own and do not represent the official policy position of the City. It is important for employees to remember that their personal communications may reflect on the City, especially if they are commenting on City business, supervisors, or policies.

The following guidelines apply to personal communications including various forms of social media, letters to the editor of newspapers, personal endorsements, email, City correspondence, newsletters, and cable television.

- All City employees are expected to actively protect any information considered private or protected under Data Privacy and HIPAA Compliance laws. (Questions should be directed to the City of Grand Rapids' Human Resources Director.)
- Employees MUST NOT post information, images, or icons obtained in their official capacity with the City on their personal social media pages and/or accounts without prior approval from the appropriate Department Head AND the City Administrator. For example, employees shall not post photos, icons, or information from an incident/call on his/her personal social media sites.
- If you wish to write an opinion based upon your work experience, you shall not make reference to the City if you are not discussing City business. For example, write, "As a police officer..." rather than, "As a City of Grand Rapids police officer..." or "As a public employee ..." rather than "As a City of Grand Rapids employee...."
- Employees shall not comment on social media or publish something related to City business without identifying themselves and using a disclaimer such as, "I am an employee of the City of Grand Rapids. However, these are my own opinions and do not represent those of the City of Grand Rapids."
- The City of Grand Rapids expects its employees to be truthful, courteous and respectful toward supervisors, coworkers, citizens, customers and other persons associated with the City. Do not engage in name-calling or personal attacks.
- Refrain from making comments about the workplace, policies, or supervisors, or discussing internal employment issues on social media. Assume anything written

about a coworker or supervisor will be read by that coworker, your supervisor, and many others.

- Remember that what you write or post is public, and will be so for a long time. It also may be spread to large audiences without your knowledge or permission. Refrain from sending or posting information – including images or icons – that you would not want your supervisor or other employees to read, or that you would be embarrassed to see in the newspaper or viewed by your parents, spouse, or loved ones.
- City resources, working time, or official City positions must not be used for personal profit or business interests, for promotion of religious views, or to participate in personal political activity. For example, an employee must not use any City logo (including the Pokegama Golf Course logo or public safety badges or logos), email, or working time to promote his/her side business or for personal gain.
- Personal social media account names or email names shall not be tied to the City (eg, using your City email address when posting).

### **Social Media Guidelines For Elected Officials**

Elected officials should comply with the following guidelines when using City of Grand Rapids social media sites:

- Elected officials shall not use official City social media sites for campaigning purposes.
- Elected officials shall not post comments or links to any content that endorses or opposes political candidates or ballot propositions, including links to an elected official's campaign site.
- Elected officials should be mindful of the risks of electronic communication in relation to the Minnesota Data Practices Act and the Open Meeting Law; two-way communication between elected officials should be strictly avoided.
- Elected officials should not use social media as a mechanism for conducting official City business other than to informally communicate with the public.
- Elected officials should reveal that they are elected officials for the City if/when making a post and be honest, straightforward, and respectful.
- Elected officials should be sure that efforts to be honest don't result in sharing non-public information related to coworkers, personnel data, medical information, claims or lawsuits, or other non-public or confidential information.
- Elected officials should add value to any social media discussion by staying focused on the issue.
- To help prevent errors, elected officials should not post official information (eg, incorrect information about a new city ordinance) about the City, as it could create liability issues.
- If an elected official makes a mistake, it should be corrected as soon as the official is made aware of the error. Corrections should be upfront and as timely as possible. If you modify an earlier post, make it clear the posting has been corrected. Consider designing corrections with "Fixed link" or "Fact correction" prior to the correction.
- Elected officials who are contacted by the media on a topic of official City business should follow City communications protocols.

*Adopted by: City Council on June 27, 2022*