



TOWN OF TYRONE EMPLOYEE HANDBOOK

CHAPTER:	Handbook – Social Media Policy		
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I. PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to provide Town of Tyrone employees with guidance on the use of social media.

II. POLICY

It is the policy of the Town of Tyrone to utilize various social media platforms for the primary purpose of disseminating important information to the public. The Town's official website (www.tyronega.gov) shall serve as its primary, official internet presence and source of public information and the Town reserves the right to discontinue its use of any social media site(s) at any time at the discretion of the Town Manager.

III. SOCIAL MEDIA USE GENERALLY

- A. The Town and its various departments may establish social media accounts for the purpose of sharing information with the public. Any department wishing to establish a new social media presence after the effective date of this policy shall obtain authorization from the Town Manager.

Information shared on the Town's social media accounts includes, but is not limited to:

1. General Information about the Town and its operations;
2. Town Event and Meeting Reminders;
3. Town Job Openings;
4. Road Closures or Traffic Delays; and
5. Matters of Public Safety.

- B. The Town Manager, or a designee, shall be provided with administrator access to all social media accounts created by the Town and its departments.
- C. Authorized users of the Town's social media accounts shall be its department heads by default. Any department head wishing to have other employees manage their department's social media accounts shall obtain authorization from the Town Manager. All authorized users shall be trained on this policy.
- D. The following statement shall be posted on the Town's social media sites either directly or via hyperlink to the statement on the Town's website (www.tyronega.gov/socialmediapolicy):

*"The intended purpose of this page is to serve as a mechanism for communication between the Town of Tyrone and members of the public. However, this page is **not** the primary method of communication with the Town, and any notices or requests for Town services must be made via official communication methods identified on the Town's website, or by traditional methods of notification recognized by the Town, and no comments or posts on this page will be construed as providing notice to the Town of any claim, deficiency, dangerous condition, request, or otherwise.*

Any comments or other content posted or submitted to this page for posting, as well as personal identifying information for the page's users and visitors, and its list of fans, may be public records subject to disclosure pursuant to Georgia Open Records Laws."

- E. In addition to the above statement, each social media sites' primary page shall also contain contact information for the Town and a hyperlink to the Town website providing addresses, names, phone numbers, and email addresses of applicable department listings or Town staff and methods of making official requests for maintenance or services and notice of the condition of Town property or other similar requests.
- F. When allowed by the social media platform, an auto responder shall be set up to reply with the following message whenever the public sends a direct or private message to the Town:

" Thank you for reaching out to us. Please note that this account is not monitored 24/7, so our response may be delayed.

The best way to communicate with us and ensure a quick response is via phone and email. Please call (Provide page admin's direct line) or email your inquiries to (Page admin's email)."

- G. Content published on the Town's social media accounts shall be informative in nature and is subject to oversight by the Town Manager or a designee. When in doubt, authorized social media page administrators should discuss post ideas with the Town Manager before sharing publicly.
- H. The Town's social media pages shall not be used to "follow" businesses, individuals, or charitable organizations nor will the Town's pages be used to participate in online groups that are not created or endorsed by the Town. However, the Town's social media pages may be used to follow other local governments and civic organizations.
- I. Employees representing the Town on its social media sites shall conduct themselves at all times as professional representatives of the Town and in accordance with all Town policies.
- J. When preparing content for social media, authorized employees shall take care to ensure that the post is factual, written in a clear and concise manner, and that correct spelling and grammar are used.
- K. No communications made with the Town through any of its social media sites shall be deemed to constitute public comment or legal notice to the Town or any of its agencies, officers, employees, agents, or representatives where notice to the Town is required by any Federal, State, or local law, rule, or regulation. Any such comment or notice shall be submitted to the Town as ordinarily prescribed, and not through Town social media sites.

IV. CONTENT GUIDELINES

- A. The content of Town social media sites should only pertain to Town-sponsored or Town-endorsed programs, services, and events. Content includes, but is not limited to, information, photographs, videos, and hyperlinks.
- B. Content posted to the Town's social media sites must contain hyperlinks directing users back to the Town's official website for in-depth information, forms, documents or online services necessary to conduct business with the Town of Tyrone whenever possible.
- C. The Town shall have full permission or rights to any content posted on its social media accounts, including photographs and videos.
- D. Any employee authorized to post content on the Town's social media sites shall review, be familiar with, and comply with the social media site's use policies and terms and conditions.

- E. Employees authorized to post content on any of the Town's social media sites shall not express their own personal views or concerns through such postings. Instead, postings on any of the Town's social media sites by an authorized Town employee shall only reflect the views of the Town.
- F. Postings must contain information that is freely available to the public and must not be confidential as defined by any Town policy or state or federal law.
- G. Postings may not contain any personal information, except for the names of employees whose job duties include being available for contact by the public.

V. SOCIAL MEDIA ENGAGEMENT

- A. The sole purpose of the Town's use of social media presence is to share information with the public. At times, when a post generates comments from the public, two-way communication may be necessary. However, Town employees tasked with operating its social media pages are not expected to engage in online arguments or lengthy exchanges.
- B. When responding to comments on the Town's social media pages, authorized employees shall only provide facts and figures and should refrain from lengthy exchanges whenever possible. This is especially true when it is clear that the exchange is becoming argumentative. In these cases, employees are authorized to disengage and/or direct the citizen to the Town Manager or Police Chief (via phone or email), as appropriate, for further discussion.

In most cases, responses to comments should be in the form of a direct/private message.

- C. The Town does not monitor or engage in discourse on social media pages or groups that are not owned or operated by the Town and employees shall not engage directly with anyone on such pages or groups for any reason when representing the Town. Members of the public who utilize these pages or groups and have grievances with the Town, wish to report issues, or otherwise desire to engage with the Town must utilize direct methods of communication such as phone, email, or in-person meetings.
- D. If the Town is made aware of a post on a third-party social media page that presents erroneous or potentially damaging information about the Town, the Town Manager will determine whether a clarifying response is necessary. **In all cases, such responses shall be posted on the Town's social media pages rather than the third-party page from which the erroneous information originated. It is often appropriate,**

within the professional judgment of the Town Manager, to allow public commentary to take its course without Town intervention.

- E. Blocking individuals from accessing or commenting on the Town's social media pages is prohibited.
- F. Comments from the public on the Town's social media pages may only be moderated/removed in limited circumstances. Those circumstances include comments that contain:
 - 1. Profane or abusive language or threats.
 - 2. Content that promotes discrimination of any kind.
 - 3. Sexual material.
 - 4. Commercial solicitations/advertisements.
 - 5. Information that compromises public safety or endorses illegal behavior.
 - 6. HIPAA-protected information.
 - 7. Copyrighted material.

When removing such material, the page administrator shall document (screenshot) the comment and then note the reason for removal. This documentation should be in the form of an email to the Town Manager with the screenshot attached.

VI.. EMPLOYEE'S PERSONAL USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA (GLECP 1.20)

A. Precautions and Prohibitions

Barring state law or binding employment contracts to the contrary, Town employees shall abide by the following when using social media.

- 1. Town personnel are free to express themselves as private citizens on social media sites to the degree that their speech does not impair working relationships for which loyalty and confidentiality are important, impede the performance of duties, impair discipline and harmony among coworkers, or negatively affect the public perception of the Town.
- 2. As public employees, Town personnel are cautioned that speech on- or off-duty, made pursuant to their official duties—that is, that owes its existence to the employee's professional duties and responsibilities—may not be protected speech under the First

Amendment and may form the basis for discipline if deemed detrimental to the Town. Town personnel should assume that their speech and related activity on social media sites will reflect upon their office and the Town.

3. Town personnel shall not post, transmit, or otherwise disseminate any information to which they have access as a result of their employment without written permission from the Town Manager or Chief of Police or a designee. This includes any materials, photos/images, recordings, etc. that are owned or produced by the Town or any of its departments.
4. When using social media, personnel should be mindful that their speech becomes part of the worldwide electronic domain. Therefore, adherence to the Town's code of conduct is required in the personal use of social media. In particular, personnel are prohibited from the following:
 - a. Speech containing obscene or sexually explicit language, images, or acts and statements or other forms of speech that ridicule, malign, disparage, or otherwise express bias against any race, any religion, or any protected class of individuals.
 - b. Speech involving themselves or other personnel reflecting behavior that would reasonably be considered reckless or irresponsible.
5. Engaging in prohibited speech noted herein, may provide grounds for undermining or impeaching a police officer's testimony in criminal proceedings. Town personnel thus sanctioned are subject to discipline up to and including termination.
6. Town personnel may not divulge information gained by reason of their authority; make any statements, speeches, appearances, and endorsements; or publish materials that could reasonably be considered to represent the views or positions of the Town or its departments without express authorization.
7. Town personnel should be aware that they may be subject to civil litigation for:
 - a. publishing or posting false information that harms the reputation of another person, group, or organization (defamation);

- b. publishing or posting private facts and personal information about someone without their permission that has not been previously revealed to the public, is not of legitimate public concern, and would be offensive to a reasonable person;
 - c. using someone else's name, likeness, or other personal attributes without that person's permission for an exploitative purpose; or
 - d. publishing the creative work of another, trademarks, or certain confidential business information without the permission of the owner.
- 8. Town personnel should be aware that privacy settings and social media sites are constantly in flux, and they should never assume that personal information posted on such sites is protected.
- 9. Town personnel should expect that any information created, transmitted, downloaded, exchanged, or discussed in a public online forum may be accessed by the Town at any time without prior notice.
- 10. Reporting violations — Any employee becoming aware of or having knowledge of a posting or of any website or web page in violation of the provision of this policy shall notify his or her supervisor immediately for follow-up action.

VI. PROVISIONS PERTAINING TO POLICE PERSONNEL (GLECP 1.20)

- A. Police personnel representing the Town via social media outlets shall not make statements about the guilt or innocence of any suspect or arrestee, or comments concerning pending prosecutions, nor post, transmit, or otherwise disseminate confidential information, including photographs or videos, related to department training, activities, or work-related assignments without express written permission.
- B. Potential Law Enforcement Uses
 - 1. Social media is a valuable investigative tool when seeking evidence or information about:
 - a. missing persons;
 - b. wanted persons;
 - c. gang participation;

- d. crimes perpetrated online (i.e., cyberbullying, cyberstalking); and
 - e. photos or videos of a crime posted by a participant or observer.
- 2. Social media can be used for community outreach and engagement by:
 - a. providing crime prevention tips;
 - b. offering online-reporting opportunities;
 - c. sharing crime maps and data; and
 - d. soliciting tips about unsolved crimes (i.e., Crimestoppers, text-a-tip).

C. Safety and Security

For safety and security reasons, Town personnel are cautioned not to disclose their employment with the Town nor shall they post information pertaining to any other employee of the Town without their permission.

As such, Town personnel are cautioned not to do the following:

- a. Display department logos, uniforms, or similar identifying items on personal web pages.
- b. Post personal photographs or provide similar means of personal recognition that may cause them to be identified as an employee of the Town. Town Police Officers who are, or who may reasonably be expected to work in undercover operations, shall not post any form of visual or personal identification.