

# Fairfax County Social Media Policy & Guidelines for Official Accounts

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# FAIRFAX COUNTY SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY & GUIDELINES FOR OFFICIAL ACCOUNTS

## I.) Record of Updates

This policy and guidance will evolve as new technologies and social media sites change. Refer to this record of updates section for the latest changes.

- **MAY 2015:** Updates to reflect new social media strategy document.
- **DECEMBER 2014:** Edits to the number of initial agency/program accounts, additional language about using social media across topics rather than departments; updates to OPA's role; refined guidance for emergencies and emerging incidents; added SoundCloud platform; removal of employee sections, which are now covered in revised information technology policies.
- **JANUARY 2014:** Details for how to use social media during emergencies, updates to reference a new County Facebook Reference Guide, copyright images and other minor modifications.
- **APRIL 2012:** HootSuite, blogs, retention guidelines, new links to Communications Toolkit features and minor modifications to specific tools.
- **JUNE 2011:** Policy adopted.

## II.) Official County Social Media Sites

Every day people discuss, debate and engage Fairfax County Government in many online conversations. We recognize the vital importance of participating in these conversations and we are committed to ensuring we participate and listen in meaningful ways.

Six philosophies of Fairfax County social media:

1. Publish, engage and provide customer service with relevant, timely and actionable information, while promoting core services and key events.
2. Establish our voice to build confidence that we are a trusted source for information, especially during emergencies.
3. Use social media aggressively during emergencies and emerging incidents to empower information ambassadors, listen to community first informers and share critical information.
4. Listen to conversations about government services/programs and participate in individual, neighborhood, local, regional, state and/or national conversations.
5. Ensure the security of our social media accounts.
6. Integrate social media with other ways to deliver and share content, such as paid, earned and owned opportunities.

All accounts must follow the requirements outlined in the new social media strategy, including frequency of publishing, satisfaction surveys and setting goals for each year.

## A.) Existing Social Media Sites

The Office of Public Affairs (OPA) maintains countywide social media sites on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [YouTube](#), [Flickr](#), [SlideShare](#) and [SoundCloud](#), along with some pilot sites.

**Facebook and Twitter are available for agencies to apply for**, while other supporting platforms (YouTube, Flickr, etc.) are handled centrally through countywide accounts managed by OPA. View lists of official [Facebook Pages](#) and [Twitter accounts](#). Departments are encouraged to contribute content to existing county social media sites with existing fan bases in lieu of or in addition to their own presence.

## B.) Requesting Facebook and/or Twitter

New social media sites on Facebook and/or Twitter may be requested by first sending an email to [socialmedia@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:socialmedia@fairfaxcounty.gov). Departments/programs may not create their own social media sites. Agencies are initially limited to one account on Facebook and/or Twitter. It's also preferred if agencies launch one platform at a time. If approved, OPA will create pages with proper settings, look and feel to ensure consistency; transfer administrative rights to the agency; and provide training.

When considering a presence on Facebook or Twitter, it's important to think about goals, objectives, audiences, differences between Facebook and Twitter, and connections to other county agencies. For example, rather than an account based on a department, the public might be better served with a thematic or programmatic account based on specific content from one or multiple departments.

## C.) Publishing

### 1. Publishers

At least one public information officer (PIO) will serve as the lead staff person for official county social media sites. Duties include serving as the lead contact for an account, developing the engagement framework for posting information and responding to comments, adhering to policies, and ensuring the social media site is regularly updated. Department staff may manage day-to-day operations of a social media site, but in close consultation with the site's lead PIO.

Only county staff will serve as publishers; publishers will attend mandatory training sessions. Volunteers, interns, contractors and board/authority/commission members are not eligible to administer official accounts. View a [list of lead social media publishers](#).

### 2. OPA's Role

The Office of Public Affairs will provide the umbrella framework for the county's social media presence. In this role, OPA will:

- Serve as a silent administrator of all accounts.
- Coordinate during emergencies.
- Help post if needed.
- Provide feedback and continuous training.
- Provide new guidelines as Facebook and Twitter change.
- Amplify presence and information through countywide accounts.
- Include metrics with county stats.
- Request and/or publish messages to all or select social media accounts.

### 3. Posting Guidelines

Social media content is fleeting because updates compete for attention in personal social media news streams. Official county social media sites need to be clear, precise and follow industry best practices for posting updates. Three tenets county social media publishers must follow regarding the types of content to share:

- **Relevant:** Information that helps residents and pertains to their daily lives.
- **Timely:** Information about deadlines, upcoming events, or related to current events.
- **Actionable:** Information to register, attend, go or do.

### 4. What Not to Post:

- Information about items in litigation or about claims that could be brought against the county.
- Nonpublic information of any kind; always check with [your PIO](#) if unsure.
- Personnel, sensitive or confidential information of any kind.
- Medical information that violates a person's Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) protections.

Legal requirements and county guidelines towards the protection of confidential, sensitive, and internal use information still apply.

### D.) Links

As an extension of the county's communications platform, social media sites should include links that direct users back to the county's website for more information, forms, documents or online services as necessary. Agencies must use a link shortener to meet the requirements of character-limited platforms. Instructions to establish these accounts will be provided during training.

External links to media articles or other relevant content are permitted on official county social media sites to encourage conversation and to share information, but external links on the county's official website, [fairfaxcounty.gov](http://fairfaxcounty.gov), are [governed by a separate policy](#).

### E.) Comments

Comments from members of our community are, of course, welcome on social media sites, but comments must be monitored daily during working hours. County-created social media forums must be structured to focus discussions on a particular interest of Fairfax County rather than creating a "public forum." County publishers may only remove postings based on the guidelines below, not because a comment disagrees with county policy. When possible, social media sites that allow comments must include either a link to the following [comments policy published on the public website](#) or the complete text published on the social media site:

The purpose of this site is to present matters of public interest in Fairfax County, including its many residents, businesses and visitors. We encourage you to submit your questions, comments, and concerns, but please note this is a moderated online discussion site and not a public forum.

Once posted, the county reserves the right to delete these kinds of submissions:

1. Vulgar language

2. Personal attacks of any kind
3. Comments or content that promotes, fosters, or perpetuates discrimination on the basis of race, creed, color, age, religion, gender, marital status, genetics, status with regard to public assistance, national origin, physical or intellectual disability or sexual orientation
4. Spam or unrelated links to other sites
5. Clearly off topic
6. Advocate illegal activity
7. Promote particular services, products, or political organizations
8. Infringe on copyrights or trademarks
9. Personally identifiable medical information
10. Information that may compromise the safety, security or proceedings of public systems or any criminal or civil investigations.

If there are repeated violations, then Fairfax County will ban participation on platforms that permit organizations to ban users. Please note that the comments expressed on this site do not reflect the opinions and position of the Fairfax County Government or its officers and employees. If you have any questions concerning this social media platform, please contact the [Agency Name] at [agency e-mail]@fairfaxcounty.gov.

Comments that do not meet these criteria should be retained then deleted. Publishers should take screenshots of the original county post and the comment that will be deleted. A description detailing why content was removed or deemed not suitable should be maintained.

Publishers may choose to reply to comments and engage residents in the same way we reply to phone and email inquiries, but business decorum must prevail and factual responses -- not opinions -- must be shared. Agency staff monitoring for and replying to comments must coordinate responses with other agencies, if appropriate, so the best response can be provided.

## **F.) Emergencies and Emerging Incidents**

During emergencies or evolving incidents, all social media content and postings must be coordinated with the Office of Public Affairs as part of its Emergency Support Function 15 protocols. Depending on the incident, publishers may be directed to point to specific social media sites that will serve as the main source(s) of information. All incidents evolve over time and the county may need to change how social media assets are being used from strategic and tactical perspectives.

There are generally two scenarios when social media needs to be coordinated:

### **1. Joint Information Center Activations**

Publishers will be notified by email of Joint Information Center activations and deactivations. Between the start and end time of a JIC, please contact OPA by sending messages to OPAEmergency@fairfaxcounty.gov, not individual staff members as staff shifts will vary. Following ESF 15 guidelines, OPA may direct that select agencies staff social media.

### **2. Emerging Issues and Incidents**

When an issue or incident emerges in our community, an official Joint Information Center may not be needed. However, close coordination for all communications, including social media, is still required. Do NOT use the email address listed above in these cases.

Specifically, here's what social media publishers need to be aware of when a Joint Information Center is activated or notification is made that social media efforts must be coordinated:

**1. OPA May Publish From Department Accounts**

OPA reserves the right to post messages on any county social media account as the incident progresses. If publishers are actively working an incident, OPA will attempt to notify. If publishers are not actively working an incident, OPA will proceed to reach your audience.

**2. Unschedule Posts**

Unschedule any posts so content is not insensitive or untimely due to whatever the emergency situation may be in our community.

**3. Important Publishing Guidelines**

Keep these publishing tips in mind for effective execution of social media:

- a) Try to timestamp any time-sensitive information so it's clear when it was published. Use a template such as: "3/17, 10:33 am: (message here)"
- b) Please Facebook Share (including tagging the Fairfax County Government page) or retweet county information to fans/followers as needed. This is the best method to ensure message consistency.
- c) Be aware of hashtags on Twitter. During storms, the county generally tries to use #ffxstorm -- please include it in tweets if space permits.
- d) Content published on social media must be usable, especially to people on mobile devices. For example, provide links to webpages, not PDFs.

**4. New Social Media Sites to Support Emergencies**

OPA also reserves the right to establish new social media sites as needed.

**G.) Photo/Video Release Form and Use of Images**

Please refer to the [photo/video release form](#) in the Communications Toolkit. When posting images to social media, be sure copyright laws are not being violated. Do not simply search the Internet for an image and use it because that may violate the law.

**H.) Embedding Social Content**

**Social media content such as embedded tweets, embedded Facebook posts, YouTube videos, SoundCloud clips or Flickr galleries may be placed on county web pages** (see Sections K, L and M about accessibility for each tool). Social media content from select partners such as the state or federal government may be embedded. OPA reserves the right to use agency social media content on countywide web pages, social media sites and other platforms.

**I.) Facebook**

View a full directory of [official county Facebook pages](#).

**1. Training**

Publishers will be required to attend a mandatory pre-launch workshop that covers many Facebook page features. Publishers must also follow the the "Fairfax County Facebook Reference

Guide” that details many operational issues and best practices that must be followed.

## **2. Understanding Publisher and Personal Roles**

OPA will grant administrative rights to page publishers. All publishers must use their own personal Facebook profiles to access official county sites (the public will not know publisher identities).

## **3. Page Settings**

When OPA creates a new page, all site features that allow the public to post their own topics, pictures or videos will be disabled. County Facebook pages are not “open forums” or a place for people to share comments about any topic they choose. Temporary exceptions for turning on the wall may be used and granted by OPA in cases of emergencies where situational awareness of an unfolding event would be helpful.

## **4. Comments**

If a Facebook publisher plans to delete a comment, a screenshot of the topic and the comment must be saved for documentation purposes. Please see section E for what can be deleted. Refer to the Facebook reference guide for how to delete a comment.

## **5. External Links**

Links to media articles are permitted to generate conversation, but vary the sources and limit the number of times external links are shared.

## **J.) Twitter**

View a full directory of [official county Twitter accounts](#).

### **1. Training**

Publishers will be required to attend a mandatory pre-launch workshop. Refer to the forthcoming “Fairfax County Twitter Reference Guide” for more specific details about managing an official account.

### **2. Design of Twitter.com Pages**

All county Twitter accounts will use the same background design provided by OPA; agencies may choose their own profile icon and header image.

### **3. Hootsuite**

Publishers will use Hootsuite to manage official Twitter accounts. For security purposes, passwords for Twitter.com will not be provided to publishers.

### **4. Comments**

Unlike Facebook and its threaded conversations, Twitter publishers can only delete their own comments, not anyone else’s tweets. The disclaimer listed in section E does not apply to Twitter.

## **K.) YouTube**

### **1. Channels**

OPA maintains the county’s primary [YouTube channel](#). Other departments needing a YouTube video must work with OPA to publish clips to the county’s channel by contacting [socialmedia@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:socialmedia@fairfaxcounty.gov).

## **2. Existing Channel 16 Video**

Existing Channel 16 videos may be converted for YouTube; contact Channel 16 staff and ask for the video to be converted to a YouTube format. OPA will upload the video and contact the agency if more details are needed.

## **3. Disclaimer**

All YouTube channels must contain the following disclaimer on the home page and in the description of each video or linked to a page with the disclaimer:

Please note: Fairfax County is not responsible for the content provided on "related" and "promoted" videos that are accessible from this county's YouTube channel. All viewers should note that these related videos and comments expressed on them do not reflect the opinions and position of the Fairfax County government or its officers and employees.

## **4. Comments**

OPA receives notification of pending comments on YouTube and will approve responses that do not violate the criteria outlined in section E.

## **5. ADA Accessibility**

To ensure ADA accessibility, work with Channel 16 for captions. Agencies also may publish a text-only script on a web page and provide the link to OPA to include in the video's description.

## **6. Embedding Video Players**

YouTube video players may be embedded on the county website and other appropriate venues. Relevant videos from other government agencies or partners may be embedded.

## **L.) Flickr**

### **1. Channels**

OPA maintains the county's primary [Flickr channel](#). Other departments who want to share photos on Flickr must work with OPA by contacting [socialmedia@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:socialmedia@fairfaxcounty.gov).

### **2. Choosing Photos**

Select photos that best represent all aspects of the event or subject without being repetitive. Ten images are generally more effective than 40.

### **3. Metadata**

When submitting a request to upload photos, the following information is required:

- Title (caption) for each picture
- Tags for each set and photo; these help people search for images on Flickr or search engines such as Google
- Description for the full photo set, as well as any specific descriptions for individual photos

### **4. Comments**

Please see section E for more details. OPA receives notification of comments on Flickr, monitors for activity and will coordinate responses or deletions.

## **5. ADA Accessibility**

To ensure ADA accessibility, photos must include captions that describe the content.

## **6. Embedding Photo Players**

Flickr photo players may be embedded on the county website and other appropriate venues. See Section H for details.

## **7. More Guidelines**

[View more photo guidelines](#) in the Communications Toolkit.

## **M.) SlideShare**

### **1. Channel**

OPA maintains the county's only [SlideShare channel](#) for PowerPoint presentations and documents. Contact [socialmedia@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:socialmedia@fairfaxcounty.gov) for more information.

### **2. ADA Accessibility**

To ensure ADA accessibility, agencies must provide OPA with the original PowerPoint file (not PDFs) so the text can be published onto a text-only section of SlideShare.

### **3. Embedding SlideShare Players**

SlideShare players may be embedded on the county website and other appropriate venues. See Section H for details.

## **N.) SoundCloud**

### **1. Channel**

OPA maintains the county's only [SoundCloud channel](#) for embeddable audio clips. Contact [socialmedia@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:socialmedia@fairfaxcounty.gov) for more information.

### **2. Embedding SoundCloud Players**

SoundCloud players may be embedded on the county website and other appropriate venues. See Section H for details.

## **O.) Updating from Mobile Devices**

Publishers may use personal mobile devices to update social media through the Facebook or Hootsuite apps. If a publisher loses a personal phone and someone accesses these apps, then an official county resource is at risk. Publishers must protect county information by using a passcode on personal devices. If a publisher loses a phone, OPA and DIT Information Security must be notified immediately and social media administrative rights will be temporarily removed.

## **P.) Ideas for Other Platforms**

The E-Government Steering Committee will continuously evaluate social media opportunities. Agencies are required to work with the committee if there is interest in pursuing new tools. Contact [socialmedia@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:socialmedia@fairfaxcounty.gov) with proposals. Beta tests can be approved with a requirement to produce a six-month status report.

## **Q.) Archives and Retention**

Communications received through social media are public records that generally should be considered as “correspondence” for the purposes of Virginia retention laws (GS 19 Series 010039). Generally, such social media responses need to be retained as long as administratively necessary before it can be destroyed.

However, there are exceptions to this rule. If an agency specifically solicits public comments or communication relating to a project that is covered by another records retention schedule, then those communications should be retained with that other records series. For example, GS4 Series 010004 directs that Citizen Complaint records be retained for one year after last action. Any “complaints” should be kept for that one year period. Retention may be accomplished by keeping them online, moving them to an offline repository or printing and filing hardcopies at the discretion of the office.

If an agency is using social media to explicitly collect feedback, that agency must take steps to ascertain the appropriate retention period and retain such records for at least that period of time.

Content submitted on Fairfax County Government social media sites for posting that is deemed unsuitable because it is not related to the current subject matter or is considered inappropriate content should be retained (for example, by using screenshots). A description detailing why content was removed or deemed not suitable should be also maintained.

## **R.) Security**

Credentials for official county social media sites should be managed according to the county password policy. Passwords should maintain complexity requirements and use uppercase letters, lowercase letters, numbers, and special characters. Passwords to social media sites should be changed at a minimum of every 90 days. In the event of a compromise, or suspected compromise, passwords should be changed immediately. A Fairfax County official email address should be used to establish an official social media site when possible. Credentials to county social media sites should be protected and limited to authorized personnel. Refer to the county’s [Information Security policy](#) for more information.

## **S.) Related Policies**

Departments that use social media are responsible for complying with applicable federal, state, and county laws, regulations and policies. This includes adherence to established laws and policies regarding use of county electronic resources, copyright, records retention, Virginia Freedom of Information Act (VFOIA), Virginia Government Data and Dissemination Practices Act, First Amendment, federal and state privacy laws, and Fairfax County human resource regulations and information security policies.

Violation of these standards may result in the removal of agency social media sites or disciplinary actions against specific publishers. The Deputy County Executive who oversees information resources and technology retains the authority to remove pages.

## II.) Employees and Social Media

Fairfax County uses official social media sites to communicate information as outlined in Section I of this policy. Only those employees with administrative access and training may express official county positions or speak as the county through a government social media account.

Employees have access to social media at work and are encouraged to share county information on social media sites as various information technology, human resources and department protocols allow.

Social media sites allow you to interact with others and require careful consideration about the implications of “friending,” “liking,” “following” or accepting/sending requests. There is the potential for misinterpretation of the relationship or the potential of sharing protected information. Relationships such as supervisor-subordinate and client-patient merit close consideration where a wealth of information can be discovered if access is granted.

Refer to the [Department of Information Technology policy 70-05](#) for details about usage.

## III.) More Information

If you have questions about this policy or would like a presentation to staff about why Fairfax County uses social media, then contact the Office of Public Affairs at [socialmedia@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:socialmedia@fairfaxcounty.gov). You also may visit the [FairfaxNET resource page about social media](#). Contact the Information Security Office with concerns about security and employee usage.