



<b>Westchester County Information Technology Policy</b>	<b>No:</b> WC-P17-001
<b>IT Policy:</b>  <b>Westchester County Social Media Policy</b>	<b>Updated:</b> 02/02/2023
	<b>Issued By:</b> Westchester County Department of Information Technology (DoIT)
	<b>Owner:</b> Marguerite Beirne Chief Information Officer <a href="mailto:mcb1@westchestergov.com">mcb1@westchestergov.com</a>

## 1. Purpose

---

More people than ever are using social media technology to create, connect, and collaborate online. Westchester County recognizes the importance of social media technology and developed this policy to:

- Define the responsible use of social media by Westchester County employees and other users on the County Network;
- Establish the minimum requirements and provide best practices for the use of social media by Westchester County employees in their professional and personal capacities; and
- Help make Westchester County Government more accountable and transparent to the public while maintaining high security standards.

There are many benefits to using social media technologies in government. They improve government transparency, increase collaboration, encourage greater citizen participation, and can improve operational efficiency. Social networking tools such as blogs and wikis help humanize government as well as facilitate and encourage discussion on public policy issues. Multimedia and video sharing tools inform and engage the public about important issues without high maintenance or bandwidth costs.

There are, however, security, reputational and other operational risks associated with the proliferation of social media technology that must be mitigated through

responsible user practices and policies. Supplementing the [Westchester County Security & Technology Use Policy](#), this document provides important requirements and guidelines for the proper use of social media.

## 2. Authority

---

The Charter and Administrative Code of Westchester County, NY provides the Department of Information Technology (DoIT) with the authority to establish countywide technology policies, including technology and security standards. The County's Chief Information Officer has the authority to oversee, direct and coordinate the establishment of information technology policies, protocols and standards for County government, including hardware, software, security and business re-engineering.

## 3. Scope & Responsibilities

---

Although social media technology is constantly changing, this policy is intended to cover Westchester County employee and County Network user participation in all forms of communicating or posting information or content via the Internet, including, but not limited to, social networking sites (for example, Facebook, LinkedIn), blogs, Twitter accounts, video- or photo-sharing sites, websites, chat rooms, and other forms of online dialogue. This policy was developed in conjunction with the [Westchester County Security & Technology Use Policy](#) and does not replace any existing and applicable Federal, State and Local laws.

All Westchester County employees and any other individuals, including consultants, interns, temporaries and vendors, who have access to County technology facilities, computers or networks, are responsible for complying with this policy and for immediately reporting any known or suspected violations of this policy to their immediate supervisor or the Department of Information Technology. The CIO must approve any exceptions to this policy. Requests for exceptions and the CIO's decision must be in writing. All employees will be asked, from time to time, to sign a statement certifying that they have read and understand this policy.

**Persons who violate this policy will be subject to appropriate disciplinary and/or legal action.**

## 4. Official Social Media Sites

---

Official County use of social media is intended to broaden the reach of communication and engagement with the community and stakeholders, while leveraging new communication platforms that go beyond the Westchester County website, [www.westchestergov.com](http://www.westchestergov.com).

Westchester County social media tools should be used to:

- Deliver public information, customer service and E-Government to county residents
- Advance countywide goals such as increasing government transparency and efficiency
- Communicate directly to the public especially during emergencies

### **Existing & New Sites**

The Westchester County Office of Communications maintains the official countywide social media sites on Facebook and Twitter. There are several other social media sites that were created and are being maintained by Westchester County departments – either to promote department-wide goals or to support a specific program or division. The County’s Department of Planning, for example, maintains [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) sites from a department-wide perspective whereas the Office for Economic Development has developed social media sites to support specific programs and campaigns.

**The County’s Office of Communications must be contacted prior to the creation of any new social media sites.** This will ensure that the department or program understands the implications and responsibilities of creating a social media presence, and reduce any duplicative efforts. Communications will also monitor content on all official social media sites to the extent possible to ensure a consistent countywide message and for adherence to this policy.

The Office of Communications reserves the right to:

- Deny a County department’s request to create a social media site
- Request social media sites publish the same message about a topic
- Coordinate and/or publish information to any social media site during an emergency
- Direct departments and agencies to modify social media content based on best practices and industry norms

## **5. Social Media Content & Disclaimers**

---

When using social media sites, only users authorized by the Westchester County Office of Communications or other designee may post on behalf of Westchester County. Content posted on departmental or other County-affiliated social media sites must comply with all applicable Federal, State and Local laws, regulations and policies. County government entities are required to create a moderation process for all user generated content (i.e., comments, file uploads, etc). Depending on the

scope and purpose of the social media site, County government entities may wish to disable certain features that allow users to post content such as comments, videos, or other types of shared files.

## **Terms of Participation Statement**

A “Terms of Participation” statement outlines the expectations of the users and the publishers/content producers when using social media technologies. All County government social media sites must prominently display or link to a Terms of Participation statement that includes at a minimum:

- An outline for acceptable user behavior which includes at a minimum, provisions against the following items:
  - Advertising for private or political purposes;
  - Harassment and defamation;
  - Pornographic content;
  - Encouragement of illegal activity; and
  - Sharing of confidential, proprietary or otherwise restricted information.
- Description of the moderation techniques used by the County government entity (i.e., reviewing comments before they appear publically on the site).
- Consequences for violating the Terms of Participation.
- Contact information for questions regarding the use of the site.

Example Terms of Participation Statement:

*[DEPARTMENT] welcomes and encourages you to participate in the discussion on [SITE]. By contributing to this site, you agree not to post any content that contains advertising for private or political purposes, harassing or defaming images or language, pornographic content, encouragement of illegal activity and the sharing of confidential, proprietary or otherwise restricted information. To keep the discussion open and relevant, all content on this site is moderated by [AGENCY] staff after it is submitted by a user. [DEPARTMENT] reserves the right to delete any content and block or remove any users that violate the Terms of Participation. If you have any questions about the Terms of Participation for this site, please contact [DEPARTMENT] at [CONTACT INFORMATION].*

## **Disclaimer**

Many social media tools generate advertisements for third party websites and applications as a source of revenue. To safeguard against potential liability issues, County government entities must develop and post a disclaimer in a prominent location on each branded social media web page that contains these advertisements. All disclaimers must be approved by the Westchester County Department of Law prior to being posted.

See below for an example of a social media disclaimer:

*Thank you for visiting [DEPARTMENT] on [SITE]. The opinions and beliefs expressed on this site are those of the users and do not necessarily reflect the views or opinions of [DEPARTMENT]. Comments posted on this site are not considered formal public comment and are not promised or guaranteed to be accurate, current, or complete. [DEPARTMENT] assumes no responsibility for and expressly disclaims responsibility for updating this site to keep information current or to ensure the accuracy or completeness of any posted information. Links or advertisements provided on this website may have been placed there by the social media provider and not the [DEPARTMENT]. Their placement does not constitute an endorsement of the content, viewpoint, accuracy, opinions, policies, products, services, or accessibility of those items. Once you follow a link to another website from this website, including one maintained by Westchester County, you are subject to the terms and conditions of that website.*

## **Comments & Posting**

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, news or related to current events
- **Actionable:** Information to register, attend, go or do

Comments from the public are welcome on social media sites but comments must be monitored daily during working hours to ensure they meet certain criteria. County-created social media forums must be structured narrowly to focus discussions on a particular interest of Westchester 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.

All sections of social media sites that allow comments must include either a link to the disclaimer in section 5.2 above or the entire text pasted into the site.

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

- Vulgar language
- Personal attacks of any kind
- 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
- Spam or links to other sites
  - Clearly off topic
  - Advocate illegal activity
  - Promote particular services, products, or political organizations
  - Infringe on copyrights or trademarks
  - Personally identifiable medical information
  - Information that may compromise the safety, security or proceedings of public systems or any criminal or civil investigations

Comments that do not meet these criteria should be deleted. If feasible, publishers should take screenshots of the original post and the comment that will be deleted.

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

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.

During emergencies, all social media content and postings must be coordinated with the Office of Communications as part of its emergency support function. Depending on the incident, publishers may be directed to point to specific social media sites that will serve as the official source(s) of information. If department staff is unavailable to maintain its social media content during an emergency and Communications deems it absolutely critical to update a certain account, then information will be published. The County also reserves the right to establish new social media sites during emergencies as needed that will support an incident.

## **6. Employee Use of Social Media in Official Capacities**

---

All County employees and Network users must at a minimum adhere to the following rules when using social media technologies on County IT resources and/or in their capacities as a County employee:

- Use of social media may not interfere with any employee's productivity or detract resources from performing assigned business related duties.
- Social media behavior may in no way harm or tarnish the image, reputation and/or goodwill of the County and/or any of its employees.
- Employees are prohibited from making any discriminatory, disparaging,

defamatory or harassing comments when using social media or otherwise engaging in any conduct prohibited by The County's Non-Discrimination and Anti-Harassment policy.

- Abide by all applicable policies and work rules regarding the use of the Internet when using social media tools for business and personal use. The use of social media tools on Westchester County IT resources will be monitored by the same method as defined in those policies and work rules.
- Are responsible for all of their online activities that are: conducted with a County e-mail address; can be traced to a County domain; and/or use County resources.
- Must not discuss or post confidential, proprietary or otherwise restricted information.
- When speaking on behalf of the County in an official capacity, users must be transparent when participating in any online community. They should disclose their identity and affiliation with the County government entity.
- Communicate in a professional manner.
- Abide by copyright and other applicable laws. Participation online results in a user's comments being permanently available and open to being republished in other media. Users should be aware that libel, defamation, copyright and data protection laws apply.
- When communicating on behalf of the County, County employees must obtain the necessary authorizations by management, the Office of Communications or other designee, as appropriate.
- Must obtain permission before publishing photographs, videos or quotes of others.
- When not representing the County government entity, County employees who publish personal or professional opinions must not invoke their County government title. In such cases, users must use a disclaimer such as the following where technically feasible: "The postings on this site are my own and do not represent the position, strategy or opinion of Westchester County Government (or other County department/entity)."

## **7. Employee Use of Social Media in Personal Capacities**

---

Nothing in this section is meant to imply any restriction or diminishment of employee rights to appropriately engage in protected concerted activity under law. However, to the extent County employees use social media in their personal capacities as private citizens, the following requirements apply:

- Such use must not substantially interfere with the operation of Westchester County or any County government entity(ies), including not violating acceptable use or other policies or laws, such as laws or policies requiring confidentiality.



The following social media tips are provided as a resource to help employees navigate personal use of social media.

- Carefully consider 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.
- On your own time, you may choose to share County information. Repost and share County news, events and other information through your personal social networks to family and friends. You may choose to become a fan of the various county Facebook pages or Twitter accounts. Linking directly to the County’s website is the most effective way to share complete information.
- Even if you are not an official online spokesperson/publisher, you can help monitor social media on your own time and equipment if you choose. If you see potential issues or errors about Westchester County on a social media site, then pass them on to your supervisor.
- If you have suggestions for improvements about Westchester County Government, including your department, please state them constructively or go through proper internal channels to share your concerns and suggestions. If you witness illegal, fraudulent or unethical conduct by County employees, contact the appropriate authorities.
- Sensitive personally identifiable information is at risk if shared on social media technology. Information that is intended for friends, family, and colleagues may become available to individuals with malicious intent.
- Social media and internet usage should not be considered anonymous.
- Be aware that what you post online (comments, images, videos) is in a domain no longer controlled by you, and that your shared experiences, thoughts, and comments are no longer solely accessed by you. There is no such thing as a “private” social media site. For example, while your personal Facebook privacy settings may be adjusted so only friends can view content, those same friends can forward your comments to anyone or take screenshots of your posts.
- Monitor your friends, family, and colleagues comments on personal social media sites. Be aware that their comments and content are linked and associated with your social media accounts.
- Keep your home computer up to date with current patches and software to minimize vulnerabilities. Social media is an evolving focal point for cybercrime.
- Use strong passwords and different passwords for each online account. Change these passwords frequently or at any suspected compromise, or strange occurrences that could indicate a compromise.
- Consider use of advanced privacy settings that social media technology offers inherently through membership. However, realize that your published social media content may be probed, transmitted, stored, and archived by external



entities.

- Review the privacy and acceptable use agreements for all social media sites that you use.
- Use caution when you click links that you receive in messages from your friends on your social website. Treat links in messages on these sites as you would links in email messages. Just clicking a link can compromise your browser, computer, and your identity.

## 8. Security & Credentials

---

Credentials for official County social media sites should be managed according to the Westchester 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. Refer to the [Westchester County Security & Technology Use Policy](#) for more information regarding the County's password policy.

In the event of a compromise, or suspected compromise, passwords should be changed immediately. A Westchester 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. Should an individual with administrative privileges to social media sites leave Westchester County employment, his/her access to all applicable social media sites must be revoked immediately. This will prevent unauthorized access and help ensure the integrity of all social media sites.

## 9. Management, Retention & Disposition of Records

---

Under the guidance of the Chief Information Officer (CIO), all departments and agencies of County government are responsible for the proper management, retention and disposition of their records.

Please refer to Executive Order No. 5 of 2008 on the Proper Management, Retention and Disposition of County Records for complete details regarding statutory and regulatory requirements, and further recommendations on how to comply. The Executive Order can be found on the County's intranet site under Office of the CE → Executive Orders or by clicking here:

[http://cww.westchestergov.com/executiveOrders/2008/exec\\_order\\_5\\_001.PDF](http://cww.westchestergov.com/executiveOrders/2008/exec_order_5_001.PDF).

## 10. Physical Security

---

Employees entrusted with Westchester County computer assets, including

desktops, laptops and software, must exercise due diligence at all times to prevent theft, destruction or other misuse of the assets. Portable laptops, notebooks, smartphones, and other transportable computers containing sensitive County information must be treated with the same care provided to company documents.

## 11. Preventing Identity Theft and Data Loss

---

There are several steps that must be taken to reduce the possibility that confidential personal information in County hands will end up in the hands of identity thieves, including, but not limited to:

- Not moving County data to non-County equipment or unauthorized external, third-party hosting services (e.g., Dropbox, Google Drive, etc.) without prior written approval from the Commissioner and Chief Information Officer.
- Not copying a whole database with confidential personal information, even to a County PC or laptop. Such data should stay in the secure Data Center. The databases of public records, especially those in the County Clerk's Office, present special problems since these are required to be public. As the County has done in the past, it will continue to encourage and assist the County Clerk in redacting Social Security numbers from the images of those public records.

## 12. Contact Information

---

Submit all inquiries and requests for future enhancements to the owner at:

Marguerite Beirne, CIO  
Reference: WC-P17-001  
Westchester County Department of Information Technology  
148 Martine Avenue, Room 313  
White Plains, NY 10601  
Phone: (914) 995-8161  
Email: [mcb1@westchestergov.com](mailto:mcb1@westchestergov.com)

## 13. Revision History

---

This policy shall be reviewed at least every year to ensure relevancy.

Date	Description of Change	Reviewer

11/01/2017	Original policy release	Scott Fernqvist
02/02/2023	Fixed broken links, removed outdated references, reformatted in current policy template	Scott Fernqvist