



POLICY No. 2015-03

Social Media Policy

Originating Department Report CAO-01-2015

SMT Approval: 2015-03-01

Council in Committee: 2015-04-14

Recommendation #: 12

Council Approval: 2015-04-20

Resolution #: 70-15

Revision History:

[Click here for revision history](#)

1. Purpose

This Social Media Policy applies to Haldimand County staff, volunteers and members of boards and committees of Council. It does not apply to Members of Council. It outlines for employees, the corporate standards and principles of communicating in the online world when it relates to discussing, sharing or commenting on County business.

Additionally, it serves to:

- Protect the County's reputation and ensure consistency and professionalism in how County staff communicate with public stakeholders via online forums and social media/networking platforms.
- Provide employees with an understanding of the policies and procedures surrounding the acceptable corporate and personal use of social media sites and/or personal websites as they relate to discussing the business of Haldimand County.
- Establish protocols, criteria and courses of action for:
 - Establishing and monitoring acceptable social media tools for use by the corporation.
 - Appropriate monitoring and administration of corporate social media tools.
 - Providing timely, effective and accurate information and responses.
 - Addressing controversial or sensitive matters relating to online content about Haldimand County, its business or its employees.
 - Ensuring appropriate records management and retention efforts as it relates to online platforms and tools.
 - Ensuring appropriate protection of privacy for members of the public who engage or interact with the County via social media/networking tools.

Although this Policy does not apply to members of Council, Councillors are encouraged to follow the established Social Media Guidelines for Council/social media response chart and obligated to abide by all expectations outlined in the Council Code of Conduct (Policy No. 2008) and Logo and Coat of Arms Usage – Corporate Policy (No. 2001-24).

2. Policy

2.1 Scope

This policy applies to all Haldimand County staff, volunteers and members of Boards and Committees of Council, particularly those who make public statements (see Definitions) on corporate or personal social media accounts, social media platforms and/or personal websites that discuss, share or comment on County business. Staff responsible for maintaining county social media accounts have a responsibility to promote the openness, transparency and accountability of the work and business of the County through:

- Sharing information;
- Educating the public, and;
- Promoting municipal projects, programs and services.

Social media platforms are powerful communications tools that can disseminate information rapidly and broadly, as well as facilitate meaningful social interaction and engagement. These tools are highly accessible and easy-to-use and because they often blur the lines between the professional and personal life, they can have a significant impact on both organizational and individual reputations. Examples of social media include Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, TikTok and LinkedIn.

Staff must ensure that county-owned social media accounts – which are social media accounts that are created and operate with direct authorization from the Customer Experience & Communications division, utilize corporate e-mail addresses and are maintained by staff for the purpose of conveying official municipal news and information (see Definitions):

1. Be implemented and moderated in a manner that positively enhances the county's reputation.
2. Provide a consistent and professional voice so that residents can be assured that the information they are receiving is official information from Haldimand County.
3. Be effectively managed and monitored to ensure responses and information are provided in timely and accurate manner.
4. Have guidelines in place to address controversial or sensitive online content about the County, its business, its Members of Council or its employees.
5. Adhere to established records retention, privacy, and accessibility requirements.

County-owned social media accounts must not be used to promote individual political opinions or campaigns.

2.2 Definitions

- ‘Social Media Platforms’ and ‘Social Media Accounts’ are online communities focused on bringing people who share common interests and/or activities or who are interested in exploring the interests and activities of others through two-way communication, together.
- ‘Social Media Content Contributors’ are employees within the corporation who have been formally appointed by the Customer Experience and Communications division to speak on behalf of the County through updating the content of the County’s social media accounts.
- ‘County-owned social media accounts’ or ‘Corporate social media platforms’ are social media accounts that are created and operate with direct authorization from the Customer Experience & Communications division, utilize corporate e-mail addresses and are maintained by staff for the purpose of conveying official municipal news and information.
- A ‘Public Statement’ is a declaration made by a Haldimand County employee in any public forum, which relates to Haldimand County, its employees and/or its business and enterprise units and includes statements made in blogs, online forums or discussions, social networking sites, wikis and elsewhere in the public record.
- ‘Intellectual Property’ describes ownership of an intellectual 'product' which may have commercial value. It encompasses areas including: copyright, trademarks, patents and design.
- An ‘Official Record’ is anything which is created in the regular course of conducting County business and which documents the business of the County regardless of format. Official records document decisions, policies, procedures, transactions, activities, commitments, obligations, ownership, entitlement, legal rights, etc. of the County and are relied upon by the County or proof of such or to support County business.

2.3 Platform Selection and Account Creation

While the use of online and social media platforms creates new opportunities for enhanced communication and collaboration with residents and other stakeholders, it also creates new responsibilities for Haldimand County employees.

The Supervisor, Customer Experience & Communications will serve as a centralized resource for the establishment and subsequent oversight and use of social media platforms by the County and its enterprises, as well as for the creation and maintenance of content on those platforms.

Criteria for adopting new social media platforms – or establishing new accounts on social media platforms already in use by the corporation – will include, but not be limited to research that:

- Demonstrates the need for the specific tool/why it is required;
- Demonstrates the added benefits of using the tool;

- Demonstrates the new platform's ability to 'sync' with established corporate content management systems and content approval processes to ensure that posted content is consistent with corporate messaging and standards;
- Demonstrates that the use of the new tool will not interfere with the credibility of Haldimand County's other established social media accounts;
- Addresses any legal concerns; and
- Identifies appropriate staff resources that would be required to establish and maintain the new account.

Staff who wish to launch new corporate social media accounts must submit a written business case to the Supervisor, Customer Experience & Communications, demonstrating their request meets the criteria above. If approved, Council must be notified by a formal Memorandum prior to the account's launch. Corporate/county-owned social media accounts may not be launched without this formal approval.

2.4 Account Administration

The use of all social media accounts by Haldimand County will adhere to:

- Applicable provincial and federal laws, regulations and policies;
- The Terms of Service of each social media platform;
- All Administrative, Human Resources, Records Management policies and other applicable County policies and guidelines.

All new and existing social media platforms and accounts being used to conduct Haldimand County business will be established and administered by appointed social media content contributors (see Definitions) or staff within the Customer Experience & Communications division, as applicable.

Staff who are responsible for creating and posting approved content are also responsible for monitoring public response and providing follow up information as required.

All staff who are appointed to contribute to Haldimand County social media accounts will be trained on Haldimand County's Social Media Policy and Social Media Guidelines, including their responsibilities in regards to reviewing content submitted for posting to ensure compliance with policy and guidelines.

2.5 Site Content

Where possible, all social media accounts operated by the county will clearly indicate that they are maintained by Haldimand County and will have Haldimand County logo, the website URL, and contact information displayed.

Where possible, social media accounts working sites will link back to the official Haldimand County Internet site for forms, documents and other information.

Haldimand County social media accounts and their content will adhere to the policies and guidelines of each individual social media platform.

Updates and posts to social media accounts being used for corporate business will be created by appointed social media contributors and approved by Customer Experience & Communications staff through a third-party content management system where practicable.

Haldimand County social media accounts are intended solely for the promotion of municipal news, emergency information, community events, programs, services and facilities, with the exception of Haldimand County's business and tourism-focused corporate accounts which are permitted to share local business or tourism-related information for economic development and tourism attraction purposes. The County will not share or promote any information or event through its social media platforms that is not formally endorsed by Council and the Corporation. Exceptions to this rule include Human Resources-related postings for County contractors that fulfill essential public health and sanitation needs as required through the Public Health Act (i.e. curbside collection route drivers, water and wastewater operators see 5.2).

2.6 Social Media Commenting Guidelines

Haldimand County social media content and comments containing any of the following shall not be permitted and will be immediately removed:

- Comments not topically related to the particular matter being commented upon;
- Profane language or content;
- Personal or defamatory attacks on individuals or specific groups, including (but not limited to) Haldimand County employees, Members of Council and contractors;
- Content that promotes, fosters, or perpetuates discrimination on the basis of any prohibited grounds under the Ontario Human Rights Code;
- Sexual content or links to sexual content;
- Conduct relating to or encouraging illegal activity;
- Content related to sales, advertising or promotions falling outside of Haldimand County's mandates;
- Content for the purposes of promoting a candidate for municipal, provincial or federal elections;
- Information that compromises the safety or security of the public or staff;
- Content that violates a legal ownership interest of any other party.

Recognizing the benefit of monitoring online stakeholder input into County issues and the potential need for the County to respond to and/or correct information, County staff may access social media platforms and accounts on county-owned devices only when there is a need to obtain specific information – i.e. posts or discussions related to County business –and as long as they are done in accordance with the IT Acceptable Usage Policy.

3. Responsibilities

3.1 Supervisor, Customer Experience & Communications (or designate) Responsibilities

The Supervisor, Customer Experience & Communications will:

- Serve as a centralized resource for the establishment, oversight and use of social media platforms and accounts operated by the County and its enterprises, and act as an authority for the creation and maintenance of content on those sites.
- Review and post content created by social media content contributors as needed.
- Review content or status updates as provided from content contributors.
- Provide guidance to with respect to responding to negative feedback from the public or comments received, especially regarding sensitive or contentious information.
- Report on social media analytics to inform future social media content strategies, campaigns and decisions regarding the adoption of new platforms.

3.2 Social Media Content Contributors Responsibilities

Social media content contributors will:

- Contribute content for social media accounts on a regular basis, using the approved content management system, in accordance with approved permissions and protocols, as required.
- Adhere to all relevant corporate policies, including the Corporate Brand Guidelines.
- Participate in training to further develop content creation skills.
- Work collaboratively with the Customer Experience & Communications division to identify opportunities for information-sharing, community engagement and awareness campaigns.
- Monitor, identify and flag any issues of concern related to inaccurate or harmful public commentary on posts made.
- Work collaboratively with the Customer Experience & Communications division and applicable divisional manager to address any contentious or sensitive subject matter on social media accounts.

4. Employee Guidelines

4.1 Guidelines for Employees Using Personal Social Media Accounts

Employees may choose to follow the County's official social media accounts and are permitted to use their personal accounts to share official news from these channels. When engaging in online discussion on social media, employees are reminded of the following:

- Even if they don't identify themselves as a Haldimand County employee in their personal websites, blogs or social media accounts, employees must act according to the County's Code of Conduct. If it's not something you would say out loud to your team at work, it's likely not something that should be shared publicly on social media.

- Social media is considered an extension of the workplace when engaged in work-related activities including, but not limited to direct or indirect interactions with co-workers or when it is reasonable to assume that posts may be seen by co-workers. For this reason, employees must be cognizant of expectations outlined in the County's respect in the workplace policy and ensure that any online behaviour / interactions does not violate such expectations.
- The County doesn't expect or encourage employees to deliver customer service on behalf of the County using personal accounts. Questions about County programs or services should be directed to the County's website or customer service team.
- The County doesn't expect or encourage employees to use personal accounts to respond to questions or comments about County programs, services, decisions or policies on media websites, people's blogs, community-run social media groups or pages, or other public forums.
- When employees are online, they're in public and are expected to serve the public with integrity, honesty and respect. Employees must not share private or confidential information, or any other content that reflects poorly on them, their co-workers or the County.
- Opinions expressed on an employee's personal website, blog and/or social media account do not necessarily reflect the official position of Haldimand County. Haldimand County employees have a duty to uphold the reputation of the municipality and should refrain from engaging in personal or defamatory attacks on specific Council or administrative decisions, individuals or specific groups, including (but not limited to) other Haldimand County employees, Members of Council and contractors.
- Staff are not permitted to use Haldimand County logos, the County crest, enterprise logos, badges or other departmental identification for endorsements or any other corporate/County images or iconography on personal social media accounts and/or personal websites or to promote a product, cause, or political party or candidate.
- Employees shall not post information relative to any on-going applications, investigations, projects, etc., to personal or corporate accounts unless previously approved by the divisional manager or designate.
- Employees should make sure that online postings do not violate any non-disclosure or confidentiality obligations.
- Any photographs or video posted shall not identify any person either directly (picture or video of person) or indirectly (picture or video of items that may identify person such as street address, license plates) unless appropriate photo consent forms have been signed.
- County staff should not be posting information to their own personal social media pages – including but not limited to: Facebook, Twitter, websites or blogs during work time unless they do so during their break or lunch hour.

Haldimand County employees who fail to comply with this policy will be subject to discipline, up to and including termination of employment. In addition, depending on the nature of the policy

violation or the online channel/page content, participants may also be subject to civil and/or criminal penalties.

Nothing in this policy is intended to amend or supersede any grievance procedure or other aspect of an applicable collective agreement.

5. Social Media Content Management

5.1 Disclaimer Statement

Social Media accounts are maintained by Haldimand County for the purpose of providing useful information and relevant dialogue.

- The views of external participants commenting on this site do not necessarily represent those of Haldimand County. The county reserves the right to turn off comments on any posts with discussions that do not adhere to the Social Media Commenting Guidelines.
- The County monitors all social media accounts during regular business hours, Monday to Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., however, does not commit to replying to all comments or moderating all discussions posted.
- In no event shall Haldimand County be held responsible or liable, directly or indirectly, for any damage or loss in connection with the use of or reliance on any posting, content or information provided by another party on this site.
- The County does not accept responsibility for ads, videos, promoted content or comments accessible from any external website and we do not control or guarantee the accuracy, relevance, timeliness or completeness of information contained on a linked website.
- No personally identifiable information is collected by Haldimand County; however, personal information, which includes your Internet Provider (IP) address, may be collected, managed, processed and/or stored by a third party service provider and is therefore, not in the sole domain, custody and control of Haldimand County.

5.2 Commenting Guidelines

As social media platforms are open to two-way dialogue, members of the public are welcome to post comments or ask questions related to municipal business. However, the County expects participants to keep commentary clean and respectful. Haldimand County reserves the right to remove any posts or content that do not meet the guidelines noted below. The County will not allow posts that:

- Provide the personal information of individuals.
- Promote, foster, or perpetuate discrimination on the basis of any prohibited grounds under the Ontario Human Rights Code.
- Are a personal attack on an individual or group.
- Are profane or abusive.
- Are sexually explicit or links to content that is sexually explicit.
- Conduct or encourage illegal activity.

- Are commercial in nature and is attempting to advertise, promote or sell products or services of an individual or an individual business.
- Are for the purposes of promoting a candidate for municipal, provincial or federal election.
- Compromise public safety.
- Violate a legal ownership interest of another party.
- Do not comply with municipal, provincial or federal legislation.
- Promote an individual religion or religious service.

Notwithstanding the criteria listed above, the County reserves the right to post, refuse to post, or remove any content from its social media sites at any time, without notice.

5.3 Posting on Behalf of Other Organizations

Haldimand County’s corporate social media accounts are intended primarily for sharing information related to municipal projects, programs and services.

On occasion, Haldimand County may post content on social media accounts on behalf of corporate partners, external agencies or contracted service providers should the information be related to a matter of public interest or public health or safety.

6. Attachments

6.1 Social Media Response Chart

REVISION HISTORY					
REPORT	CIC		COUNCIL		DETAILS
CEC-04-2023	11-Apr-23	10	19-Apr-23	66-23	Policy renamed, amendments made to scope, terminology, definitions, and organizational oversight structure, and also includes new protocols, criteria and courses of action
	Date	Rec#	Date	Res#	
	Date	Rec#	Date	Res#	
	Date	Rec#	Date	Res#	
	Date	Rec#	Date	Res#	
	Date	Rec#	Date	Res#	



Social Media Response Chart

