

# Williamson County Social and Communications Media Policy



## I. Overview

Social media are a crucial piece of the 21st-century communication landscape. Williamson County (“County”) recognizes and endorses their secure use as part of a strategy to stimulate engagement among the County’s constituents. Social media present opportunity, as well as risk, for a governmental entity seeking to utilize them. Information presented, on behalf of the County, on social media sites must be done in an appropriate manner so as to maximize that opportunity and minimize the attendant risk.

## II. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to address the use of social media communications that the County may utilize to reach a broader audience where appropriate. The Williamson County Social Media Policy establishes county policy regarding establishment, management and oversight of Official County social media accounts. This policy also addresses, but is not limited to, the specific forms of social media below. Technology is ever evolving and new forms or outlets of social media, not specifically listed, will arise. Authorized individuals should apply the same general guidelines for all forms of social media.

## III. Official Williamson County Social Media Presence

All Official County presences on social media venues are considered an extension of the County’s information and communications network. All Official County use of social media must be in compliance with this policy.

Official County social media sites should use links to direct users back to the County’s Official Website [www.wilco.org](http://www.wilco.org), specific department pages on [wilco.org](http://wilco.org) or other governmental sites for more information, forms, documents or online services necessary to conduct business with the County.

## IV. Definitions

The use of “social media,” for the purpose of this policy, refers to all means of communicating or posting information or content of any type on the Intranet or Internet. This includes but is not limited to a web log or blog, journal or diary, personal website, social networking or affinity website (such as Facebook, Flickr, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn, Instagram, Nextdoor), web bulletin boards, on-line chat rooms and other forms of social media which may become available.

## V. Establishment of Social Media Accounts

Requests for new Official County social media accounts must be sent to the Williamson County Public Affairs Manager (“Public Affairs Manager”) for approval and may not be created until approved. Requests will be evaluated based on how it will help offices and departments reach their stated goals, amount of posts that can be generated, individuality of the audience and staff available to post and monitor the site. The Public Affairs Manager will assist offices and departments with selecting appropriate social media outlets and defining a strategy for engagement using social media.

Williamson County ITS Department (“ITS”) will create all new accounts using only an Official County account. No personal email accounts can own an Official County social media account. Except for social media accounts created by a Williamson County elected official prior to the Effective Date of this policy, ITS also will maintain passwords for Official County social media accounts. As for social media accounts created by a Williamson County elected official prior to the effective date of this policy, such elected official shall provide ITS with all passwords to his or her office’s Official County social media accounts prior to the last day of his or her term or date of his or her resignation or removal from office. If passwords are changed, please notify ITS. All Official County social media accounts must include the Public Affairs Manager and ITS as administrators for the account. Other social media administrators or editors may be added at the discretion of the Public Affairs Manager, the department head, or elected official upon the execution of the Social Media Policy Acknowledgement Form attached to this policy. Social media administrators or editors may be removed by the Public Affairs Manager for failing to abide by the expectations, policies and guidelines of this policy or at the discretion of their department head or elected official.

Each elected office or department head is responsible for designating a social media editor(s) to be added as an asset in Oracle so that Oracle can send a notification if that person is no longer an employee of the county. **In the event an elected office or department wishes to add an employee or take authorization from one employee and give it to another, those changes must be made in Oracle.**

The social media editor for each elected office and department shall:

- review social media sites or tools that have already been established in their offices and departments to ensure that they are in compliance with this policy;
- ensure the office or department social media sites are regularly maintained and kept current (frequent review of sites that provide opportunity for comment or other interaction is essential);
- ensure that information placed on the social media venue is accurate, professionally presented, respectful, relevant and on topic with the office or department’s mission (care must be taken to ensure that grammar and spelling are correct. Mistakes must be corrected quickly); and
- sign the Social Media Policy Acknowledgement Form attached to this policy

## **VI. Official Statements and Press Releases**

All Williamson County departments and employees reporting within a chain of command to the Williamson Commissioners Court **must** contact the Public Affairs Manager for assistance with Official County statements and press releases. For routine or general information media requests, County department heads shall either respond directly to the news media or shall contact the Public Affairs Manager to discuss any serious, sensitive, controversial or countywide impact requests.

It is strongly encouraged and recommended that Williamson County Elected Officials contact the Public Affairs Manager for assistance with official statements and press releases relating to their specific offices if they do not have a designated Public Information Officer.

## **VII. Crisis Communication**

Per Texas Government Code Sec. 418.1015., the County Judge, as the presiding officer of the governing body of an incorporated city or a county or the chief administrative officer of a joint board, is designated as the emergency management director for the county. During a crisis, all communication regarding the crisis is to be centralized and approved by the emergency management director or coordinator and distributed by the designated Public Information Officer. The PIO will have the ability to post crisis communications to the main county social media accounts and the emergency services social media accounts. Other county accounts are encouraged to share and repeat the same messages in order to have greater dissemination of the approved communications, but should not deviate from the approved message.

## **VIII. User Comments**

Where possible, social media pages should make clear that opinions expressed by visitors to the page do not reflect the County's opinions. Social media pages shall clearly state that user comments are moderated and will be subject to removal, and shall include the following notice:

“Williamson County’s social media accounts are a moderated online presentation of information, news and comments and are not a public forum. Comments posted by users do not necessarily reflect the views of Williamson County. User comments that include profanity, personal attacks, ideas irrelevant to the topic or advertising will be subject to removal and a user’s posting of comments in violation of this policy may result in a blocking of that user’s access to the account. Users should present questions regarding a County official’s policy or procedure directly to the County official. This site is monitored during regular business hours, 8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m., Monday-Friday.”

Social media accounts are interactive forms of communication with the public. If a comment is made, question asked or message sent, a response should be given within 24 hours during the week

or on Monday if over the weekend.

Comments in violation of the above criteria shall be archived – either by printing or taking a screen shot of the comment – then deleted, with a description maintained for record-keeping purposes detailing why the comment was removed.

## **IX. Copyright**

Only original photos, videos or graphics created by county employees or held in county archives are allowed on social media pages. Downloading or distributing copyrighted material without the permission of the copyright owner is against the law. Illegal downloading or distribution of copyrighted materials can result in you being prosecuted in criminal court and/or be sued for damages in civil court.

## **X. Employee’s Personal Use of Social Media**

Employees must not use their County e-mail address to register on social networks, blogs or other online tools utilized for **personal** purposes. The County recognizes that employees may choose to participate in social media activities when off-duty, and in no way seeks to limit an employee’s use of social media on their own time. However, employees should ensure that their off-duty social media activity does not interfere with their work for the County or with their workplace relationships.

Unofficial County statements posted on a personal social media venue are discouraged, and if made should include a disclaimer stating that the posting is not the official position or opinion of the County. A recommended disclaimer could be worded as follows: “The postings on this site are my own opinion and do not reflect or represent the opinions of Williamson County or the department/elected office for which I work.”

Employees should refrain from posting any information, rumors, gossip, photographs, video or audio of co-workers, clients, customers, and vendors of the County without the express permission of the other individual(s). Such activity, even if conducted while off duty, could affect the work environment and may be a violation of other County or elected office policies.

Information posted on social media sites can be accessed by a wide audience and the social media participant has limited ability to restrict access to such posts. It is reasonable to expect that one’s social media postings may be viewed, copied, forwarded, printed or otherwise shared with multiple people, including elected officials, department heads and other employees of the County. Employees are responsible for their own social media activity and are solely responsible for any liability created by posting any defamatory or libelous information about another individual or organization.

Employees are prohibited from disclosing any information on the Internet, Intranet or in any other manner obtained in the course of their employment that is confidential, personal or private, unless

so required by state law or a court order. Violations of copyright laws and restrictions and privacy policies are prohibited. Questions regarding any disclosure should be directed to the County Attorney. Employees who violate any County policy may be subject to discipline by their department head or elected official, up to and including termination of employment.

## **XI. Compliance with Laws**

The County's social media technology use shall comply with all applicable federal and state laws, county regulations and policies including, but may not be limited to, copyright, First Amendment, privacy laws, employment related laws and County established usage policies.

Information that is proprietary, subject to the attorney-client privilege or state or federal privacy laws, and information not subject to disclosure under the Texas Public Information Act shall not be posted on any County social media site.

## **XII. Texas Public Information Act and Records Retention**

Pursuant to Section 441.158 of the Texas Government Code, the Texas State Library and Archives Commission promulgates records retention schedules for records of local governments. The retention period for a record depends on the content of that record, regardless of the medium in which it is maintained. The Public Affairs Manager shall preserve records on a County server for the required retention period in a format that preserves the integrity of the original record and is easily accessible. Further, the Public Affairs Manager will destroy, transfer, or otherwise dispose of records in accordance with records disposition schedules. Through a contracted vendor, the Public Affairs Manager retains records for the following 10 accounts: Twitter @WilcoGov; @PreparingWilco; @WilcoElection and Facebook @WilcoGov; @PreparingWilco; @WilcoElections; @Quarry-Splash-Pad; @WilliamsonCountyJuvenileServices; WilcoExpoCenter; WilcoVets. Elected officials or departments that maintain any other accounts shall be responsible for complying with the Texas Public Information Act and Records Retention.

The County's social media sites are subject to the Texas Public Information Act (TPIA), found in Ch. 552, Texas Government Code. Content in County social media, including a list of subscribers and posted communications, is public record. Content shall be maintained in an accessible format so that it can be produced in response to a request.

## **XIII. Guidelines for Specific Forms of Social Media**

### **A. YouTube/Vimeo Web Video**

YouTube and Vimeo are free video-sharing websites on which users can upload, share and view videos.

- The County will place appropriate videos online using YouTube and/or Vimeo.
- The County is a registered user on YouTube, meaning that the County can upload

videos, and the County YouTube "channel" is branded with the County logo.

- YouTube accounts are established by ITS. Offices and departments must send a request for an Official County YouTube channel to the Public Affairs Manager.
- Designated staff of the Public Affairs Manager, ITS and specific county staff who have been granted editing access for their office or department will be the only staff with access to post content on Official County YouTube/Vimeo accounts.
- Any department or office that has not been granted editing ability can send e-mail requests to place programmatic information on an official County YouTube/Vimeo Pages to the Public Affairs Manager or the Public Affairs Manager's designated staff.
- The Public Affairs Manager must review and approve all videos requesting posting prior to posting on the main county YouTube/Vimeo accounts. Please allow three business days for review (depending upon the length of the video). Videos will be reviewed for quality, consistent overall County message, priority, goals, etc. Additional time may be needed to edit or upgrade the video project, if needed.
- ITS will only post videos to Wilco.org as directed and approved by the Public Affairs Manager.
- Official County YouTube/Vimeo pages content added by others besides the Public Affairs Manager and designated staff will be reviewed regularly after posting for quality, consistency with overall County messages, priority goals, etc.
- Contact the Public Affairs Manager for any questions related to YouTube/Vimeo.

## **B. Blog**

A blog is a type of website, usually maintained by an individual with regular entries of commentary, descriptions of events, or other material such as graphics or video. The County does not currently have an Official County blog at the time this policy was adopted; provided, however, the following policies will apply to future Official County blogs:

- The County may place appropriate messages and information online using an Official County Blog(s) for the purpose of sharing timely information with residents about County government and emergency services communications.
- The Official County logo must appear in the Blog banner.
- Official County Blogs must use approved County selected template.
- Blogs must be used as "Blogs" and cannot replace content posted on Wilco.org or become departmental web pages.
- All blog applications must be submitted to the Public Affairs Manager.
- Designated staff of the Public Affairs Manager, ITS and specific county staff who have been granted editing access for their office or department will be the only staff with access to post content on Official County Blog accounts.
- Comments posts are moderated by the Public Affairs Manager, ITS and specific county staff who have been granted editing access for their office or department.

- E-mail requests to place information on an Official County Blog must be sent to the Public Affairs Manager or the Public Affairs Manager's designated staff.
- Official County Blog content added by others besides the Public Affairs Manager and designated staff will be reviewed regularly after posting for quality, consistency with overall County messages, priority goals, etc.
- Social media administrators or editors may be removed by the Public Affairs Manager for failing to abide by the expectations, policies and guidelines of this policy or at the discretion of their department head or elected official.
- Contact the Public Affairs Manager for any questions related to Blogs.

### **C. Facebook**

Facebook is a free-access social networking website that users can join to connect and interact with other people or organizations.

- The County will place appropriate messages and information online using Facebook.
- The County maintains Official County Facebook accounts for the purpose of sharing timely information with residents about County government and emergency services communications.
- Designated staff of the Public Affairs Manager, ITS and specific county staff who have been granted editing access for their office or department will be the only staff with access to post content on Official County Facebook accounts.
- Any department or office that has not been granted editing ability can send e-mail requests to place programmatic information on an official County Facebook Page to the Public Affairs Manager or the Public Affairs Manager's designated staff.
- Facebook content added by others besides the Public Affairs Manager and designated staff will be reviewed regularly after posting for quality, consistency with overall County messages, priority goals, etc.
- Social media administrators or editors may be removed by the Public Affairs Manager for failing to abide by the expectations, policies and guidelines of this policy or at the discretion of their department head or elected official.
  - Contact the Public Affairs Manager for any questions related to Facebook.

### **D. Twitter**

Twitter is a free social networking and micro-blogging service that enables users to send and read other user's updates, known as "tweets." Tweets are text postings which are displayed on the user's profile page and delivered to other users who have subscribed to them (known as followers).

- The County will place appropriate messages and information online using the

County's Official Twitter account(s) for the purpose of sharing timely information with residents about County government and emergency services communications.

- Designated staff of the Public Affairs Manager, ITS and specific county staff who have been granted editing access for their office or department will be the only staff with access to post tweets on the County's Official Twitter account(s).
- Any department or office that has not been granted editing ability can send e-mail requests to post information on Twitter to the Public Affairs Manager or the Public Affairs Manager's designated staff.
- Tweets added by others besides the Public Affairs Manager and designated staff will be reviewed regularly after posting for quality, consistency with overall County messages, priority goals, etc.
- Social media administrators or editors may be removed by the Public Affairs Manager for failing to abide by the expectations, policies and guidelines of this policy or at the discretion of their department head or elected official.
- Contact the Public Affairs Manager for any questions related to Twitter.

#### **E. Instagram**

Instagram is a free online mobile photo sharing social media network. The following policies will apply to Official County Instagram accounts:

- The County will place appropriate photos and information online using Instagram.
- The County's Official County Instagram accounts are used for the purpose of sharing timely information with residents about County government and emergency services communications.
- Designated staff of the Public Affairs Manager, ITS and specific county staff who have been granted editing access for their office or department will be the only staff with access to post content on Official County Instagram accounts.
- Any department or office that has not been granted editing ability can send e-mail requests to place photos and information on Official County Instagram accounts to the Public Affairs Manager or the Public Affairs Manager's designated staff.
- Official County Instagram content added by others besides the Public Affairs Manager and designated staff will be reviewed regularly after posting for quality, consistency with overall County messages, priority goals, etc.
- Social media administrators or editors may be removed by the Public Affairs Manager for failing to abide by the expectations, policies and guidelines of this policy or at the discretion of their department head or elected officials.
- Contact the Public Affairs Manager for any questions related to Instagram.

#### **F. Nextdoor**

Nextdoor is the private social network for neighbors and communities to receive information and communicate. Public agencies are allowed to post to Nextdoor neighborhoods. Any member of a neighborhood that has received a public agency post can reply to and view other replies to that agency post.

It's important to note that while County staff can post to neighborhoods in their service area, they can only see their own posts and replies to these posts. They will NOT be able to see any other content on your neighborhood website.

- The County will place appropriate messages and information online using Nextdoor.
- The County maintains Official County Nextdoor accounts for the purpose of sharing timely information with residents about County government and emergency services communications.
- Designated staff of the Public Affairs Manager, ITS and specific county staff who have been granted editing access for their office or department will be the only staff with access to post content on Official County Nextdoor accounts.
- Any department or office that has not been granted editing ability can send e-mail requests to place programmatic information on an official County Nextdoor account to the Public Affairs Manager or the Public Affairs Manager's designated staff.
- Nextdoor content added by others besides the Public Affairs Manager and designated staff will be reviewed regularly after posting for quality, consistency with overall County messages, priority goals, etc.
- Social media administrators or editors may be removed by the Public Affairs Manager for failing to abide by the expectations, policies and guidelines of this policy or at the discretion of their department head or elected official.
- Contact the Public Affairs Manager for any questions related to Nextdoor.

**WILLIAMSON COUNTY, TEXAS**

**PASSED AND APPROVED** by the Williamson County Commissioners Court to be effective as of this \_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 20\_\_ (Effective Date)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Dan A. Gattis  
Williamson County Judge

\_\_\_\_\_  
Terry Cook  
Commissioner Precinct 1

\_\_\_\_\_  
Valerie Covey  
Commissioner Precinct 3

\_\_\_\_\_  
Cynthia Long  
Commissioner Precinct 2

\_\_\_\_\_  
Larry Madsen  
Commissioner Precinct 4

# Social Media Policy Acknowledgement Form

I, the undersigned, have been designated by my office or department to serve as a social media editor. I have reviewed the Williamson County Social Media Policy, and, by signing below, I confirm that I am familiar with the contents of the Williamson County Social Media Policy and I agree to abide by the expectations, policies and guidelines listed therein. I understand that failure to do so may lead to removal of my editing or posting authority. I also understand that violations of the Williamson County Social Media Policy may also lead to, at the discretion of the elected official or department head under which I am employed, disciplinary actions, up to and including termination.

Elected Office/Department Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_, 20\_\_\_\_