

GRIMES COUNTY SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

1. POLICY

- 1.01 Social media continues to evolve and change the way we work and communicate internally and externally, including how Grimes County interacts with the public. While social media creates new opportunities for communication and interaction, it also creates new responsibilities and risks.
- 1.02 Grimes County and its representatives, including employees and public figures, are held to a stricter standard than general members of the public. The County's purpose in utilizing social media is to reach a larger County audience, supplying County-related information and news to its constituents, and to provide an avenue for members of the public to report safety concerns and other related information to the County. While the County respects and encourages employees to participate in social media to whatever extent they feel comfortable, online activities should reflect professional expectations and standards. Codes of Ethics and Conduct expected in other professional interactions are also expected in the use of official County social media.
- 1.03 Nothing in this policy should be interpreted as interfering with the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA) Section 7 or constitutionally protected rights, and the provisions included herein are written and should be interpreted with that intent. Discussions and opinions related to the terms or conditions of employment are protected and encouraged. These guidelines are not intended to restrict communications or actions protected or required by state or federal law.
- 1.04 Grimes County is a public entity, representing a large and diverse group of people, including members of the public. Readers of social media communications put out by the County and its public figures have different customs, values, opinions, affiliations; and thus the County does not support or permit viewpoint discrimination or encourage one voice over another in public discourse and communications. The County also seeks to eliminate material that may be considered malicious, obscene, harassing, or threatening to readers and viewers. If an employee encounters communications or other social media material not in keeping with the County's standards, they should immediately contact the department head or elected official with supervisory responsibility over the social media presence.
- 1.05 This policy establishes the procedures for all official Grimes County use of social media to ensure that it is aligned with County interests. This policy applies to all Grimes County employees reporting to the Commissioners Court. All Grimes County elected officials and their staff are encouraged to follow this policy as best practices for social media use and management.

2. DEFINITIONS

- 2.01 When this policy uses the term "social media", it means any digital technology or practice that enables people to use, create and share content, opinions and insights in conversations over the internet. This includes many of the platforms traditionally identified as social media such as Facebook, X (formerly known as Twitter), LinkedIn and NextDoor. However, it also includes other communication channels such as YouTube, TikTok, Flickr, Instagram, WhatsApp, blogs, wikis and comments on websites.

3. PROCEDURES

- 3.01 Before engaging in social media activity on behalf of Grimes County, elected officials and departments should consider their goals, the legal issues, technical capabilities, ability to comply with this Policy and the potential benefits and risks.
- 3.02 Grimes County departments and elected officials utilizing social media shall ensure their use of social media complies with all applicable laws, ordinances and policies.
- 3.03 Grimes County social media must be utilized only for the purpose of conducting official County business. County social media or social networking platforms should only be conducted by authorized personnel acting in an official capacity. Employees are prohibited from using County computers and other County communication devices for unofficial participation in social media.
- 3.04 Use of Grimes County logos and trademarks are limited to persons specifically authorized to do so on official County pages. If you are not authorized to speak on behalf of the County on social media, your department's name and symbols/logos should not appear on your social media communications. Before an official Grimes County account can be established on any social media site, a department must define a need and purpose, and secure written approval from the department head and notify the County IT Director.
- 3.05 To establish a Grimes County account on a social media platform, a department must use a County email address when creating an account. This County email address shall be a generic email address, as opposed to an individual employee's email address. Messages to the generic account will be forwarded to the personnel responsible for maintaining the social media account.
- 3.06 All Grimes County social media accounts shall include the Grimes County IT Director as an administrator. The account will indicate County ownership and display the department's name and contact information. The account will also provide a link to the official Grimes County website.
- 3.07 All Grimes County social media accounts shall include the Grimes County Social Media Disclaimer set forth below or a link to the Disclaimer within the social media platform.
- 3.08 Grimes County departments and agencies maintaining an official County social media account should delegate responsibility for management of the County social media account to an employee with the required level of authority. This account manager and the department head shall have access to all user account information, including login, email and password information. The department or agency should identify personnel authorized to utilize the account and designate personnel to regularly monitor the information published or distributed under the department's purview.
- 3.09 The account manager will ensure that passwords comply with Grimes County policy and will remove access credentials when an employee is no longer authorized to access the account.
- 3.10 The account manager will update the County social media presence as often as necessary to ensure that posted information is current and accurate. Departments are responsible for monitoring all social media under their purview.
- 3.11 Departments will respond in a timely manner to public-generated content, such as comments and questions, monitor all public-generated content and remove prohibited content from public view at the discretion of the administrator of the account. Those departments maintaining a social media account(s) have the discretion to turn off all third-party comments; however, should third-party comments be permitted, removal of any comments will be consistent with the Grimes County Social Media Disclaimer.

- 3.12 All Grimes County social media content, including postings, messages, comments and responses is potentially subject to and shall be retained in accordance with the Texas Public Information Act (Texas Open Records Act), Chapter 552, Texas Government Code and County policies pertaining to record management, maintenance and retention, and shall be accessible in response to requests for information. This includes content removed from public view.
- 3.13 Grimes County's main website shall include a directory of, and links to, all County social media accounts and the Grimes County Social Media Disclaimer.
- 3.14 Any Grimes County social media presence created before the effective date of this Social Media Policy must comply with its provisions and procedures within thirty days of the effective date of this Policy.
- 3.15 Should it be the intent of any department to terminate a social media account, notice will be provided to the IT Department at least thirty days prior to such termination.

4. CONTENT

- 4.01 Individuals authorized to post content on Grimes County's social media accounts shall not express personal views through such postings.
- 4.02 If you are authorized and speaking on behalf of Grimes County, be clear that statements are made on behalf of the County. For example, include an official County logo in the profile or posts. It is important that readers and viewers be able to distinguish between personal and County communications. This includes ensuring that communications:
 - 4.02.1 Are fair and courteous;
 - 4.02.2 Are not offensive, malicious, obscene, harassing or threatening;
 - 4.02.3 Are not designed to harm someone's personal or professional reputation;
 - 4.02.4 Do not contain jokes based on protected characteristics such as race, sex, religion, or disability;
 - 4.02.5 Do not contain confidential, personal, or otherwise non-public information;
 - 4.02.6 Do not violate privacy laws, contain unauthorized logos or trademarks, or contain copyrighted work; and
 - 4.02.7 Do not otherwise violate local, state, or federal law.
- 4.03 Grimes County-generated social media content shall:
 - 4.03.1 Be appropriate for viewing by the public;
 - 4.03.2 Be factual;
 - 4.03.3 Be promptly corrected in the event of errors or misrepresentations; and
 - 4.03.4 Avoid promoting personal views and opinions.
- 4.04 Grimes County employees may be privy to non-public information, including but not limited to law enforcement and other protected information and procedures, personally identifying and protected health information and more. The policies and rules for private and confidential information apply to social media participation, and employees are prohibited from sharing non-public, County information on social media.
- 4.05 Grimes County employees managing social media accounts shall:
 - 4.05.1 Conduct themselves as representatives of the County;
 - 4.05.2 Avoid conducting political activities; and
 - 4.05.3 Conform to the social media site's terms of service.
- 4.06 Social media content shall adhere to all applicable federal, state and local laws, regulations and policies, including Grimes County information technology and records management policies.

- 4.07 The following is not allowed on Grimes County social media and, if posted, shall be removed from public view. Content that:
 - 4.07.1 Contains vulgar, obscene, threatening, abusive, harassing or defamatory language or images;
 - 4.07.2 Is harmful to children and minors;
 - 4.07.3 Is invasive of privacy;
 - 4.07.4 Contains offensive content targeting protected classes, or is racially or ethnically objectionable;
 - 4.07.5 Discloses personally-identifiable medical or health information, or other confidential or sensitive information that the poster does not have permission to disclose;
 - 4.07.6 Endorses criminal conduct;
 - 4.07.7 Endangers the safety of the public;
 - 4.07.8 Contains commercial advertising;
 - 4.07.9 Includes endorsements or campaigning for political candidates;
 - 4.07.10 Infringes any copyright, trademark, patent or other proprietary right;
 - 4.07.11 Contains spam; or
 - 4.07.12 Is posted anonymously or under a false name.
- 4.08 Grimes County reserves the right to restrict or remove from public view any content it deems to be in violation of County policy.
- 4.09 Grimes County retains full permission and rights to any content posted to County social media platforms, including photographs and video.

5. BEST PRACTICES

- 5.01 Employees should endeavor to make clear in their personal profile or posts (versus County profiles or posts) that statements and opinions are their own personal views and that they are not speaking on behalf of the Grimes County.
- 5.02 Employees who are or could be considered public figures or officials should be especially careful to ensure content associated personal social media is consistent with the procedures and guidelines that apply to official Grimes County social media when open to the public or there is potential for confusion between their public servant and private voice. Even with an appropriate disclaimer, public figures should keep in mind that their statements can be construed by employees and the public as speaking for the County due to the nature of their position. When in doubt, all employees should seek guidance from their department head.
- 5.03 Social media communications can be held to the same legal standards as more traditional media communications. Keep records of Grimes County online social media dialogues and activity. The County may be required to preserve information that is relevant to possible claims or investigations, or that is subject to laws such as the Texas Public Information Act.
- 5.04 Social media channels may often include negative posts about Grimes County. If you are not specifically authorized to do so, these matters are better handled by those trained and authorized to speak on official County social media channels. Please pass any negative posts that you feel require further attention or that violate this policy to the department head.

6. GRIMES COUNTY SOCIAL MEDIA DISCLAIMER

- 6.01 Comments, images, photos and links posted to Grimes County managed social media accounts do not necessarily represent the views of Grimes County. The County's policy is to allow comments in accordance with these guidelines.
- 6.02 Content will be removed from public view if it:
 - 6.02.1 Contains vulgar, obscene, threatening, abusive, harassing or defamatory language or images;
 - 6.02.2 Is harmful to children and minors;
 - 6.02.3 Is invasive of privacy;
 - 6.02.4 Contains offensive content targeting protected classes, or is racially or ethnically objectionable;
 - 6.02.5 Discloses personally-identifiable medical or health information, or other confidential or sensitive information that the poster does not have permission to disclose;
 - 6.02.6 Endorses criminal conduct;
 - 6.02.7 Endangers the safety of the public;
 - 6.02.8 Contains commercial advertising;
 - 6.02.9 Includes endorsements or campaigning for political candidates;
 - 6.02.10 Infringes any copyright, trademark, patent or other proprietary right;
 - 6.02.11 Contains spam; or
 - 6.02.12 Is posted anonymously or under a false name.
- 6.03 Users certify that they have permission to post all information contained in their postings, including images and videos and that no trademark or copyright infringement has been committed.
- 6.04 Postings are intended for public use. Users do not retain any rights over their postings and any personal information posted releases any rights to privacy.
- 6.05 Grimes County does not guarantee that information posted by users is accurate and disclaims liability resulting from reliance on such information.
- 6.06 Users who repeatedly violate this policy will be prohibited from commenting on Grimes County social media accounts.

SIGNED: February 28, 2024



Joe Fauth, III
Grimes County Judge

ATTEST:



Vanessa Burzynski
Grimes County Clerk