

**City of Amarillo**  
**Personnel Policies and Procedures**

Policy Title: Communications and Social Media Policy

Policy Number: 1410

Effective Date: April 2, 2021

Approved by: Jared Miller, City Manager  
Mitchell Normand, Director of Human Resources

**I. Purpose**

The City of Amarillo (“City”) is committed to open, transparent government operations and to providing accurate and timely information to the public. The City strives to do so by maximizing communication channels and fostering constructive relationships between the public and City officials and employees.

**II. Scope**

This policy applies to all City departments, officials, and employees of the City of Amarillo.

**III. Procedures**

The City of Amarillo Office of Public Communications (“OPC”) has final responsibility and authority to create, direct, assign, monitor, and manage all official communication programs for the City. The OPC is led by the Director of Communications, who reports to the City Manager.

**IV. Methods of Communication**

The OPC utilizes a variety of communication platforms to distribute information to the public. These methods are routinely evaluated and improved. They include, but are not limited to:

- The official City website: [www.amarillo.gov](http://www.amarillo.gov)
- Social media channels including, but not limited to, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, and LinkedIn
- The official City blog: “Open Spaces”
- Video updates, including “Amarillo 360”
- Email newsletters
- Direct contact via email, phone, video, or in-person interaction at City facilities
- Utility bill inserts
- Traditional media engagement, such as interviews and press statements or media statements
- Publications on City programs including flyers, brochures, and pamphlets
- Electronic street signs utilized for road closings, detours, and other transportation information
- Event signage
- Verbal announcements at meetings hosted by the City or City officials
- Bulletin boards located at the entrance of City Hall

**V. Media Relations**

- A. Maintaining proactive, productive relationships with the news media is a key component to realizing the City's communication goals. To facilitate a mutually beneficial relationship, the City must communicate a consistent and organized message.
- B. City employees are not permitted to communicate as an official representative with the media, on social media, or in any public event without prior authorization from the OPC.
- C. Any City employee who is contacted by the news media shall immediately notify his or her supervisor who shall, in turn, notify his or her department director, providing details of the situation and possible implications. The department director must then promptly provide the OPC and any other affected department director with a written or verbal report of the situation and recommended action. The following positions will be the points of contact for their areas of responsibility:
  - 1. The Mayor, City Council Members, and City Managers shall provide information on policy and other topics that have citywide significance or impact.
  - 2. The Fire Chief, Police Chief, and Emergency Management Director (and their respective departmental public information officers) shall provide information about public safety and emergency events.
  - 3. Department Directors shall provide information on the planning, direction, effect, and status of policies and programs within their own departments.
- D. The OPC shall compile and provide background information for the media when requested and will schedule live interviews when deemed appropriate by OPC.
- E. Media members that arrive onsite must be referred to the OPC. Members of the media are allowed to be in public areas of City-owned property so long as their activities do not disrupt the functions of City departments.
- F. In the event of a potentially newsworthy event or with controversial implications, the OPC and relevant department directors must be notified immediately.
- G. The OPC will designate a single spokesperson to ensure accurate and complete information is released and to determine if a media conference should be called or media statement issued.
- H. Any time a story containing factual discrepancies is published in any format, it is the responsibility of the affected department directors to immediately inform the OPC.

**VI. Media statements**

- A. Unless otherwise specifically authorized by the OPC, all statements to the news media issued by the City shall be coordinated and disseminated through the OPC so that the statements are standardized and consistent and the OPC is better able to provide departmental support.
- B. Media statements promoting routine events and activities may be written and edited by individual departments and then must be emailed to the OPC for review and distribution.

**VII. Departmental Support**

- A. The OPC supports all City departments with services such as image licensing (trademark or copyright), media pitching, graphic design, social media marketing, community outreach, and communication and marketing plans.
- B. Any request for OPC support can be submitted via the intranet at: <https://my.cityama.com/employee-resources/website-guidelines-for-contentmanagers/marketing-requests>
- C. Departments and OPC will cooperate for the best outcome.

## **VIII.**

### **Licensed Images**

- A. Unless otherwise specifically authorized by the OPC, the only approved method of obtaining images for any City use is through the OPC. This includes images for websites, brochures, posters, or any other use. This better assures proper copyright compliance and protects the City from infringement claims.
- B. A request for images can be submitted to the OPC via the intranet at: <https://my.cityama.com/employee-resources/ada-general-best-practices/stock-image-request>

## **IX.**

### **Public Information Requests**

- A. Public Information Requests must be handled in accordance with the City's Guidelines for Responding to Requests for Public Information.
- B. Employees are not permitted to release sensitive information that the public or other employees may not be privy to.

## **X.**

### **Logos, Brand Awareness, and Style**

- A. Uniformity of logos and brand elements for the City of Amarillo is required in order to establish professional standards and appearance for the City's communications. Employees must use standardized templates for all marketing material, press statements, and official correspondence, including email signatures.
- B. No employee or department shall create a logo, trademark, tagline, motto, or other marketing image without prior consent and coordination with the OPC and Legal. This is for the City's protection and the employee's.
- C. Comprehensive guidance on the proper use of the City's brand is available in the City of Amarillo Brand and Style Guide.

## **XI.**

### **City Social Media Accounts**

- A. No department is authorized to create a social media account representing any city department or function without written approval from the OPC.
- B. Employees who are not authorized by the OPC are prohibited from using City-associated social media accounts. A "city-associated" means one that is established by the OPC or is authorized by the OPC for a city department that promotes the interests of that department. All City and City-associated accounts will be referred to collectively herein as "City social media" accounts.
- C. The OPC will monitor the City's social media platforms to ensure posted information and comments do not violate the Communications and Social Media Policy.
  - 1. Employees managing or posting on behalf of the City or a City department on a City social media account must comply with federal, state, and local laws and regulations, and with City and department policies.
  - 2. Employees are required to act and respond with civility. Employees must understand that their personal views and opinions must be removed when using a social media account associated with the City.
- D. Employees are prohibited from engaging in the following practices while using City social media accounts:
  - 1. Violating the copyright, trademark, or other intellectual property rights of any person or entity, or otherwise violates their legal ownership interests.
  - 2. Using slurs, profanity, personal insults; material that is harassing, defamatory, fraudulent and/or discriminatory; or other content or communications that would not be acceptable in a City workplace under City or department policies or practices.

3. Violating the terms of usage governing the use of any social media content, including but not limited to, software and other intellectual property licenses
  4. Displaying sexually explicit images, cartoons, jokes, messages, or other material(s) in violation of the City's policies.
- E. Releasing information that contains confidential or "for official use only" information or information that compromises the security of City networks or information systems. Such for official use only or confidential information includes, but is not limited to, information that is protected under federal, state, or local ordinances (except as permitted under such laws and ordinances), as well as social security numbers and other personally identifiable information of employees, citizens, or elected officials.

## **XII. Administrators of City Social Media Accounts**

- A. The Department Director of a department having or using a social media account will designate the employees responsible for maintaining and updating such social media accounts.
1. Each department must have at least two moderators responsible for the department's social media sites, in case of illness, absence, etc. of one moderator.
  2. Moderators are expected to post to their designated page a minimum of 3 times per week, however posting (at least) once a day is recommended. At all times, moderators shall use good judgment when posting. Employees shall not make any post, or share any posts, that violates any provision of this policy. Confidential information shall not be posted.
  3. When there is a personnel change involving the assigned moderator, the Department Director, or designee, must immediately notify the OPC. The OPC will be responsible for changing passwords for the related sites immediately.
- B. To encourage engagement and increase transparency, it is the City of Amarillo's intent to leverage social media as a method of two-way communications. To that end, comment and forum features will be activated to allow users to make comments and ask questions.
1. Complaints and requests for service must be directed to the appropriate department to be addressed.
  2. A standard reply may be used to direct users with concerns related to sensitive or complex issues, as appropriate. This standard reply shall read something like: The City of Amarillo is very interested in insights and concerns expressed here. However, complex topics typically are not effectively discussed in forums such as this. Please contact (Department Name) at 806-378-\*\*\*\* if you wish to voice your concerns further or obtain additional information.
  3. Moderator and OPC shall not delete or edit any public comment without prior consultation with the City Attorney's Office, because the City can be sued for a moderator or OPC infringing on the public's free speech without a proper cause per the First Amendment). A City cannot lawfully edit or delete posts except in narrow circumstances. At times, moderators may determine that it is best not to respond to a post at all.
  4. Comments that would be considered, spam, illegal, commercial, or contain personal attacks, offensive language, private or confidential information will not be posted and/or will be deleted or hidden. The "personal attacks" is limited to attacks on private citizens. The courts have ruled that the public has the right to strongly, even crudely, criticize public officials. If a moderator is uncertain about

the appropriateness of an item to be published or a reply to be made, he/she must consult with their Department Director or OPC before proceeding. The OPC may consult with the City Attorney's Office as needed.

5. The OPC shall ensure that all information sent or received through social media sites is maintained in compliance with the Texas Public Information Act as well as with the City's records management policy.
- C. Social media accounts must provide worthwhile information that helps customers or employees solve problems, promote activities or events, improve services, educate, processes and policies, or build a sense of community. Frivolous information shall not be posted. If there is uncertainty about something to be published, do not publish unless approved by the department director in consultation with OPC.
1. Moderators shall use word-processing software with spellcheck capability before posting. Messages should be clear, complete, and concise.
  2. Whenever possible and appropriate for the specific message, moderators shall duplicate text from, or link to, other documents or existing City web pages to maintain messaging consistency and compliance with records management policy.
- D. Before finalizing a post, verify it uses correct grammar and spelling, and that the information is accurate. Moderators **shall not** use any copyrighted content taken from the internet except in accordance with the process and protections stated in this Policy.

### **XIII. Personal Use of Social Media**

The City recognizes that many individual employees use social networking outlets for their own purposes. Employees may be subject to disciplinary action for certain internet postings. The policy of the City of Amarillo is to abide by all applicable federal laws regarding public speech by government employees and to not inhibit protected free speech as described just below.

- A. Employees who use social media in their off-duty personal time have the right of free speech as guaranteed by the First Amendment. However, employees do not have freedom to say absolutely anything concerning the City of Amarillo.
1. The federal courts have ruled that Employee speech that merely airs a personal disagreement or dispute with a supervisor or the employer is **not** protected speech and may result in disciplinary action.
  2. The federal courts have also ruled that Employee speech concerning a matter that is of general public concern may be protected by the First Amendment depending on the balancing of the following competing values:
    - a. The degree of public need to know about the matter stated; and
    - b. The City's interest in maintaining good order in the workplace and avoidance of insubordination or other rule violations.
- B. Employees may only use personal social media during designated breaks unless given prior authorization to use personal social media during work hours.

### **XIV. Enforcement**

Failure to adhere to the requirements of this policy will be considered a violation of Personnel Rules Causes for Discipline and may result in disciplinary action up to and including termination. Appropriate disciplinary action may vary depending on employee disciplinary history and mitigating or aggravating circumstances.

### **XV. Exceptions**

Department Directors, in consultation with OPC and the City Legal Department, may institute department specific limitations and restrictions as deemed necessary. In the event a departmental policy conflicts with the requirements of this policy, the City of Amarillo policy will be the governing policy. The City Manager reserves the right to modify or override this policy at any time.