

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

Policy Title: Communications and Social Media Policy

Policy Number: 1410

Effective Date: December 19<sup>th</sup>, 2023

Approved by: Andrew Freeman, Interim 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 Engagement & Innovation (“OE&I”) has final responsibility and authority to create, direct, assign, monitor, and manage all official communication programs for the City. The OE&I is led by the Director of Engagement & Innovation.

**IV. Methods of Communication**

The OE&I utilizes a variety of communication platforms to distribute information to the public. These methods are routinely evaluated and improved. They may 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, X (formerly known as Twitter), Instagram, YouTube, and LinkedIn
- The official City newsletter: “Open Spaces”
- Video updates, including “Amarillo 360”
- Direct contact via email, phone, video, or in-person interaction
- Utility bill inserts
- Traditional media engagement including interviews, press statements, and media statements
- Publications 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

**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 with the media as an official representative of the City either on social media or at any public event without prior authorization from the OE&I.
- C. Some departments have received approval by OE&I for specific department staff to interact with the media. Those departments include Police, Fire, Library, and Parks & Recreation. Those individuals are required to adhere to the following conditions in their media interactions:
  - 1. Only staff specifically approved by OE&I (and their respective department directors) are authorized to respond to media inquiries.
  - 2. Media interactions must be restricted to specific information about programs and announcements and only related to that respective department.
  - 3. Any media inquiry must be sent to the Media Relations Manager in the OE&I department to facilitate a response.
- D. 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 OE&I Media Relations Manager 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, City Attorney, 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 heads shall provide information on the planning, direction, effect, and status of policies and programs within their own departments.
- E. The OE&I shall compile and provide background information for the media when requested and will schedule live interviews when deemed appropriate by OE&I.
- F. Media members that arrive onsite must be referred to the OE&I. Members of the media are allowed to be in public areas of City-owned property so long as their activities do not disrupt emergency operations or the functions of City departments.
- G. In the event of a potentially newsworthy incident or an incident with potentially controversial implications, City of Amarillo employees involved or notified of the event must contact the OE&I and relevant department directors immediately. The OE&I will then 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 inaccuracies is published in any format, it is the responsibility of the affected department directors to immediately inform the OE&I.

**VI. Media statements**

- A. Unless otherwise specifically authorized by the OE&I, all statements issued by the City to the news media shall be coordinated and disseminated through the OE&I so that the statements are standardized and consistent and the OE&I 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 OE&I Media Relations Manager for review and distribution.

## **VII. Departmental Support**

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

## **VIII. Licensed Images**

- A. Unless otherwise specifically authorized by the OE&I, the only approved method of obtaining images for any City use is through the OE&I. 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 OE&I 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.

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

- A. Uniformity of the City's logos and brand elements establishes 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 OE&I and Legal Department.
- C. Comprehensive guidance on the proper use of the City's brand is available in the City of Amarillo Brand and Style Guide available on the intranet.

## **XI. City Social Media Accounts**

- A. No department is authorized to create a social media account or social media group purporting to officially represent any City department or function without written approval from the OE&I.
- B. Unless authorized in writing by the OE&I, employees are prohibited from managing City-associated social media accounts. A "City-associated" account is one that is established by the OE&I or is authorized by the OE&I for a City department to promote the interests of that department. All official City and City-associated accounts will be referred to collectively herein as "**City Social Media**" accounts.
- C. The OE&I will monitor the City Social Media accounts to ensure posted information does not violate this 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 all City and applicable department policies.
2. Employees are required to treat citizens with civility and professionalism. Employees must understand that their personal views and opinions must be removed when using a City Social Media account.
- D. Employees are prohibited from engaging in the following practices while managing City Social Media accounts:
1. Violating the copyright, trademark, or other intellectual property rights of any person or entity, or otherwise violating their legal ownership interests.
  2. Using slurs, profanity, or personal insults; material that is harassing, defamatory, fraudulent, or discriminatory; and other content or communications that would not be acceptable in a City workplace under any City or applicable department policy or practice, or that would bring discredit to any City department or the public service.
  3. Violating the terms 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 in violation of City policy.
  5. Releasing information that contains confidential or “for official use only” information. Such “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.
  6. Releasing information that compromises the security of City networks or information systems.

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

- A. The director of a department having or using a City Social Media account will designate the employees responsible for maintaining and updating such social media accounts. Unless otherwise approved by the OE&I, only full-time employees may be granted access to City Social Media accounts, including approved department pages. A current list of active users must be provided to the OE&I when changes are made to the list and as otherwise requested by the OE&I.
1. Each department must have at least two administrators responsible for the department’s social media accounts. The OE&I must be notified of the designated administrators, including their contact information. Additional administrators may be added only with the approval of the applicable department director. When necessary, the OE&I will be responsible for changing passwords for the related sites.
  2. The City’s Social Media Manager must be an administrator on all City Social Media accounts with full access to passwords and login information.
  3. The OE&I should be made aware of all City Social Media accounts or groups. These pages must be in compliance with record retention policies.
  4. Prior to final approval for operating a City Social Media account, administrators must attend an initial Social Media Training provided by the OE&I as well as any subsequent training or performance reviews provided by the OE&I for City Social Media administrators.

5. Administrators are expected to post to their departmental page a minimum of 3 times per week; however, posting (at least) once a day is recommended.
- B. To encourage engagement and increase transparency, it is the City's intent to leverage social media as a method of two-way communication. To that end, comment and forum features will be activated to allow users to make comments and ask questions.
1. Administrators should direct complaints and requests for service to the appropriate department to be addressed.
  2. A standard reply may be used for citizen concerns related to sensitive or complex issues, as appropriate. This standard reply shall read something like:
    - a. *Hi, {First Name}! We are very interested in the 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. No person may delete, edit, hide, or moderate any posts or citizen comment without prior consultation with the Legal Department. Under the First Amendment, the City cannot lawfully edit or delete citizen comments except in extremely narrow circumstances and in consultation with the Legal Department. If an administrator is uncertain about the appropriateness of an item to be published or a reply to be made, they must consult with their department director and OE&I before proceeding. The OE&I may consult with the Legal Department as needed.
  4. The OE&I shall ensure that all information sent or received through City Social Media accounts is archived in compliance with the City's records management policy.
- C. City Social Media accounts must provide worthwhile information that helps customers or employees solve problems, promotes City activities or events, improves City services, educates, or builds 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 OE&I.
1. Administrators shall use word-processing software with spellcheck capability before posting. Messages should be clear, complete, and concise.
- D. Before finalizing a post, verify that it uses correct grammar and spelling, and that the information is accurate. Administrators **shall not** use any copyrighted content taken from the internet except in accordance with the process and protections stated in this Policy.
- E. Administrators should use the City of Amarillo Branding Style Guide when creating social media graphics or posts.
- F. Administrators are prohibited from creating TikTok accounts for any City department.

### **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 City's policy 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. Employee speech that merely airs a personal disagreement or dispute with a supervisor or employer is **not** protected speech and may result in disciplinary action.
  2. 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.
- C. Employees are prohibited from using TikTok on any government-issued device.
- D. Employees may not create any personal social media account with their city-issued email address.

#### **XIV. Enforcement**

Failure to adhere to the requirements of this Policy will be considered a violation of the City's Personnel Rules 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 OE&I and the 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, this Policy will be the governing policy. The City Manager reserves the right to modify or override this Policy at any time.

### **Addendum 1: City of Amarillo Policy for Elected Officials and Appointed Boards, Commissions and Committees Using Personal or Professional Social Media Platforms**

## **Addendum 1: City of Amarillo Policy for Elected Officials and Appointed Boards, Commissions and Committees Using Personal or Professional Social Media Platforms**

While elected officials and City Council-appointed board, committee, and commission members may maintain and use personal web pages and websites, blogs, and social networking sites, their status as elected or appointed officials requires that the content of any postings on those sites not be in violation of the City of Amarillo's Charter, ordinances, or policies.

The City's image as a professional organization is critical to maintaining the respect and trust of its constituents. Although the City recognizes that elected and appointed officials may choose to express themselves by posting personal information on social media platforms or by commenting on sites hosted by other persons, groups, or organizations, this right of expression should not interfere with the ongoing ordered operation of the City. That is, although the City acknowledges its officials have the First Amendment right to free speech, the right is not absolute when involving matters of official City business, issues, or concerns.

If an elected or appointed official conducts any City business or official communication from any type of account, they should assume that those communications will be considered public record and subject to the Texas Public Information Act and should be retained in accordance with City record retention policies.

### **Professional and Personal Conduct Standards**

1. All officials should conduct themselves in a manner consistent with the City's policies and standards of conduct.
2. From time to time, officials may have access to information that is considered privileged or confidential under law. Releasing confidential or privileged information may not only harm the City's position in certain matters, but may also carry specific criminal penalties. Officials must be particularly careful to protect against the inadvertent disclosure of confidential or privileged information.
3. Officials should be honest and accurate when posting information or news, and should quickly correct any mistakes, misstatements, or factual errors in content upon discovery. Officials should not post or share information known to be false about the City or its employees, constituents, other public officials, suppliers, vendors, or contractors.
4. Unless the official has been designated to serve as a spokesperson, officials should never represent themselves as a spokesperson for the City Council, any City board or committee, City administration, or any City department.
5. Officials should not use personal or professional social media to engage in any activity or conduct that violates federal, state, or local law.
6. Unless specifically allowed by state law, officials should be mindful that posting content regarding City-related matters could inadvertently result in a violation of the Open Meetings Act if a number of other public officials also engage with the post, resulting in a quorum. If this occurs, the online conversation should immediately cease with no further posts by the officials, and the City Secretary should be notified accordingly.

### **Additional Best Practices and Guidelines for Elected and Appointed Officials**

The following best practices and guidelines are strongly recommended to ensure that the personal and professional use of social media by elected and appointed officials is done so in a responsible manner.

1. All elected official social media profiles should be made into professional accounts for posting city information, news, or updates. Public officials are strongly encouraged to separate personal social media accounts from professional elected official social media accounts or campaign social media accounts.
2. Officials are strongly encouraged to exercise caution with respect to comments they post, particularly those concerning the City and the business of the City.
3. Officials are strongly encouraged to consider the potential impact of social media statements prior to posting. The City strives to be professional in its operations and processes. Posts that express favoritism or bias for or against any individual or group of individuals (e.g., based upon race, gender, national origin, sexual orientation, political affiliation, etc.) reflect poorly on the public official, as well as on the City and its residents. Further, such comments could expose the City and the elected official to liability and legal costs.
4. Officials should consider whether liking, sharing, retweeting or commenting on any social media post could be perceived as an endorsement by the City or its employees, constituents, other public officials, suppliers, vendors, or contractors.
5. Officials should refrain from using social media accounts to communicate with City employees about City-related matters. If elected officials want the City's official pages to respond to a social media inquiry, the following responses are suggested:
  - a. X: "Thanks for your inquiry! Please tag @CityofAmarillo on your inquiry so the appropriate City department may respond to you directly."
  - b. Facebook: "Thanks for your inquiry! Please tag @City of Amarillo on your inquiry so the appropriate City department may respond to you directly."
  - c. Instagram: "Thanks for your inquiry! Please tag @cityofamarillo on your inquiry so the appropriate City department may respond to you directly."
6. Officials should refrain from using City-issued email addresses to create or update personal or professional social media page settings.
7. Elected officials may not use the City logo to express personal opinions or statements.