

BLAIR COUNTY POLICY



TITLE: SOCIAL MEDIA

BLAIR COUNTY POLICY NO.: 307

POLICY APPROVAL BY:

COMMISSIONERS:	Initials	Date
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1.0 POLICY

All County Employees who choose to participate in Social Networking must do so in a responsible, professional, ethical, and lawful manner. This policy is intended to assist the employee in navigating the fast-changing landscape of the internet, blogging, and social networking sites. Employees are reminded that they are professionals and serve as representatives of the county in the community in all aspects of their lives and should conduct themselves publicly in accordance with the responsibilities inherent in public service.

2.0 PURPOSE

- 2.1. Professionalism, ethics, and integrity are of paramount importance. To achieve and maintain the public's highest level of respect, we must place reasonable restrictions on our conduct and hold to these standards of conduct whether on or off duty. An Employee's actions must never reflect negatively upon the County or its Departments or bring the Employee, County, or the Department into disrepute, nor should an Employee's conduct be detrimental to the County or Department's efficient operation.
- 2.2. To ensure that the release of confidential information to persons outside the Department is disseminated only in compliance with the County's and Department's policies and procedures. Employees are to treat the official business of the County and their Department as confidential.
- 2.3. To clearly identify prohibited employee conduct on social networking and other web sites, both on and off duty.
- 2.4. To establish policy concerning personal web pages and internet sites, including references to the County and Department and to ensure employees use appropriate discretion so as not to discredit the County or Department.
- 2.5. To protect the County, Department, and the employee from harm as the result of inappropriate postings or inadvertent harmful postings.
- 2.6. This Policy is intended to guide Employees' conduct as it relates or reflects upon their employment by the County or their representations of employment by the County through various social networking venues.

3.0 POLICY TRAINING

- 3.1. All Employees will become familiar with and adhere to the provisions of this Policy and receive training and notification pertaining to this Policy by in-service training, internal mail, email, and/or occasional network log-on reminders.

4.0 DEFINITION OF SOCIAL NETWORKING

- 4.1. "Social Networking" is hereby defined as use of social network sites that allow individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile within that system, define a list of other users with whom such individuals share some connection, and view and access their list of connections and those made by others within that system. The type of network and its design vary from site to site. Examples of the types of internet based social networking sites included: blogs, networking sites, photo sharing, video sharing, microblogging, podcasts, as well as comments posted on the sites. The absence of or lack of explicit reference to a specific site does not limit the extent of the application of this policy. *The definition of Social Networking will be construed by the County and the Department as broadly as reasonably possible.*

5.0 GUIDELINES

- 5.1. Employees may identify themselves as Employees of the County and the Department where they work. However, if an employee does acknowledge their employment with the County or their department, the employee will be responsible for ensuring that their actions do not reflect negatively on the County or their Department. These employees shall also be responsible for any content on their social networking page, including comments and photographs, without regard as to who originally posted the comment or photograph. Further, these employees will be responsible for conforming their use of social networking sites to all applicable County policies, including any policies addressing internet usage.

If the employee identifies his or her employment with the County, the employee is responsible for representing the County in a professional manner from that period forward while they remain employed by the County. Under no circumstances should employees discuss any workplace situations, including employee discipline, personnel information, or other employees, on a social networking site.

If the employee does elect to identify himself or herself as a County employee, the employee, at a minimum must post on any social networking site used by the employee, a disclaimer that makes it clear that the opinions expressed are solely those of the employee and do not represent the views of the County. An example of a disclosure to use in these circumstances is:

"The posts on this site, including but not limited to images, links, and comments left by readers, are my own and are not intended to represent my employer's positions, strategies, or opinions."

- 5.2. Confidential, Law Enforcement, and Medical Information: Employees shall not purposefully or inadvertently disclose any information that is confidential, medical or law enforcement sensitive. Employees shall consult the County's other policies for guidance about what constitutes "confidential" information as it relates to your Department.

Posting the following types of information to social networking sites is explicitly prohibited:

- Confidential, sensitive, or copyrighted information to which you have access due to your employment with the county;
- Data, including photographs, videos, or audio recordings;
- Photographs of clients, suspects, arrestees, evidence, residents, victims, etc.;
- Comments related to pending investigations;
- Pictures or videos of official Department training, activities, or work related assignments without the express written permission of the Department Director.

- 5.3.** Adverse Impact on Departmental Activities: Employees are prohibited from posting content that is inconsistent with his or her duties and obligations or detrimental to the activities of the Department.
- 5.4.** Productivity: County Employees shall comply with the County's Computer System/Internet Use Policy and recognize that all time and effort spent on their personal site shall be done on their personal time and shall not interfere with their job duties.
- 5.5.** Employees should not use the County's name to promote or endorse any product, cause, or political party or candidate.
- 5.6.** The employee should be honest about their identity when utilizing social networking. Employees should not pretend to be another person. Tracking tools enable supposedly anonymous posts to be traced back to their authors.
- 5.7.** All social media users are liable for what they post on their own site and on the sites of others. Individual bloggers and social media users have been held liable for commentary deemed to be proprietary, copyrighted, defamatory, libelous, or obscene (as defined by law). Employees should also be aware that the County may conduct web searches in order to determine if it is being referenced in an inappropriate or illegal manner. As a representative of the County, please be aware that your postings may be viewed by residents and clients and where inappropriate may subject an employee to discipline as appropriate.
- 5.8.** While employees should be honest about their identity, they should not provide personal information that scam artists or identity thieves could use against you. Do not list your home address or telephone number or work telephone or e-mail address. It is a good idea to create a separate e-mail address that is used only with your social media site.
- 5.9.** Comments are a major part of the social networking environment, but employees should review and approve all comments before they appear. This allows the employee to delete any spam comments, block inappropriate posts, and delete any offensive or frivolous comments.
- 5.10.** Employees should be aware that even privacy settings are not fool-proof. Search engines can turn up posts and pictures years after they have been published to the internet. Sites such as Google constantly crawl the web and archive websites, allowing them to continue to be viewed even after the information has been removed or the site terminated. Employees are

advised that they should not post when they feel angry or passionate about a subject and they should wait until they calm down if they are going to reply or post on any blog or social networking page.

5.11. Employees should use care in the photos of themselves that they post. Only pictures that they would be comfortable sharing with their parents or employer should be posted. Employees should check pictures posted by their friends to ensure that a search for the employee's name does not bring up images of the employee that they themselves did not post.

5.12. Disciplinary Action: Employee's shall use common sense in all communications, particularly on a website or social networking site accessible to anyone. What an Employee says or posts on a site or what is said or posted on a site by others may be grounds for discipline, up to and including discharge. If an Employee would not be comfortable with his or her supervisor, co-workers, or the management team reading his or her works, it is likely that such words should not be written. Employees are legally liable for anything they write or present online. Employees can be disciplined by the county for any on-line conduct, commentary, content, or images that violate County or Departmental policies or procedures, that are defamatory, pornographic, proprietary, harassing, libelous, or that can create a hostile work environment.

6.0 RELATIONSHIP OF THIS POLICY TO THE COUNTY'S COMPUTER SYSTEM/INTERNET USE POLICY

6.1. This Policy is intended to supplement the County's Computer System/Internet Use Policy. Notwithstanding any provision of the County's Computer System/Internet Use Policy or of this Policy, no Employee is permitted to use any County owned computer, computer system, or electronic communications system to access any Social Networking website for the Employee's personal use and may only do so for official County or Department business.