

7-15 Employee Internet and Social Media Posting

PURPOSE: The purpose of this policy is to establish guidelines for employees who post information to and access personal web pages or social networking technologies. Despite the fact that social media is still an emerging technology, the City of Suwanee, through this policy, seeks to establish some basic guidelines for City employees who use social media technologies, both at the worksite and away from it. The intent of this policy is not to prohibit employees' personal expression on the Internet. However, an employee's online presence reflects upon the City, and employees should be aware that actions captured via images, posts, or comments may discredit the City or adversely affect the efficiency or integrity of the City.

Statement of Policy

I. POLICY

It is the policy of the City of Suwanee that employees may use social media technologies. However, it is the responsibility of employees to ensure that such references do not cause a decline in public confidence in and/or respect for the City or the individual employee. Employees must exercise appropriate discretion, so as not to discredit themselves or the City.

II. SCOPE

This policy shall apply to all City of Suwanee personnel. This policy applies to an employee's use of social media technologies, both at the worksite during business hours and away from the worksite during non-business hours. Personnel who violate this policy may be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment.

III. DEFINITION & APPLICABILITY

This policy shall apply to the online technologies and practices that employees use to share opinions, insights, experiences, and perspectives, known familiarly as "social media". In many cases, social media is associated with an Internet-based website where members of that site can electronically gather to share personal profiles with other members. Social media can take many different forms, including text, images, audio, and video. Social media sites typically use technologies that include, but are not limited to, blogs, message boards, podcasts, posts, wikis, and vlogs. Examples of current social media applications include, but are not limited to, MySpace, Facebook, Twitter, and Blogger. The term "friend" or "follower" in the world of social media has a different connotation than the traditional definition might imply. When an employee is a "friend" or "follower" of someone, the City interprets this as a communication connection, similar to storing a phone number in an e-mail or phone address book. Social media is still an emerging technology and the way in which people use the technology will continue to change. As new tools are introduced, this policy will evolve accordingly.

IV. PRIVACY

City of Suwanee employees should be aware that information posted on the Internet is not secure or private, even if active steps are taken to restrict access to an employee's site. Once information has been posted on the Internet, it is trackable, traceable, and accessible indefinitely. In addition, police employees, in particular, are advised that, in the event information has been posted on the Internet identifying them as a police officer, they may be ineligible for specialized positions where anonymity is required.

V. LIABILITY

All employees should be aware that due to the nature of their employment in the public sector, they are held to a higher standard. As a result, certain kinds of Internet postings may be detrimental in both the employee's personal and professional capacity. Whether social media technologies are used during or after business hours or posts made on personal or publicly accessible websites, employees should assume they are at all times representing the City of Suwanee and employee postings, images, etc. are a reflection of both the City and its staff. In the event employees choose to post information that causes a decline in public confidence in either the City or the employee in their official capacity, they should be aware that they will be held accountable through the City's standards of conduct and action may be taken as outlined in the City's disciplinary policies. Employees should consider the possible adverse consequences of some Internet postings with respect to future employment, cross-examination in court cases, and potential public/private embarrassment. Employees are encouraged to seek the guidance of supervisors regarding any posting that they are concerned may adversely reflect upon either the City or upon the professionalism or integrity of the employee.

VI. RESTRICTIONS

- A. General Use. Employees may post personal information that is not inconsistent with this policy. Such posts may include general information about City activities, including information about the workplace, an employee's projects, etc. For certain positions, the City recognizes social media as a significant and effective communication tool.
- B. Co-Worker Interactions. Employees may be "friends" of other employees, at each employee's discretion. No employee is obligated, however, to interact with co-workers through social media technologies.
- C. Photographs. Employees may post photographs or other depictions of the City of Suwanee, including City facilities, events, etc. However, the City reserves the right to require pre-approval of such posts and/or if such posts bring discredit to the City, to require the employee to remove the post.
- D. Logos & Trademarks. Employees may not post the City's adopted logos and trademarks without supervisor approval.

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- E. Inappropriate Material. An employee's posting and/or association with pictures, video, artwork, comments or other reference depicting violent, sexually explicit, racial or ethnically derogatory material is inappropriate.
- F. Adverse Impacts to City. Employees shall not post or be associated with any material on the Internet that brings discredit to or may adversely affect the efficiency or integrity of the City of Suwanee or the employee in their official capacity.
- G. Worksite Usage. The City recognizes that social media technologies are an emerging form of communication. The City permits very limited personal usage of social media technologies during the workday, similar to receiving a personal phone call of a limited duration. Employees should use discretion and understand that even very brief periods of usage can collectively amount to significant periods of time. Supervisors have the right and ability to further restrict usage, as appropriate.
- H. Files from City Devices. Employees may not upload any audio/video files captured on devices owned by the City of Suwanee, without prior approval by his/her department manager.
- I. Political Communications and Participation. Employees are not permitted to use social media technologies to influence or affect the results of any election or nomination while acting in their official City capacity, on City time, or using any City equipment.
- J. Privileged & Confidential Information. Employees are not permitted to post any privileged or confidential information.
- K. Judgment. Employees should use good judgment in their postings and social media activity. If the content of a post is not something that an employee would feel comfortable with their supervisor reading or viewing, it is probably inappropriate and in conflict with this policy.