

## Rutherford County Government Social Media Policy, Guidelines, & Acknowledgement Form

These are the official guidelines for social media at Rutherford County Government (the "Social Media Policy"). This policy applies to every *constitutional officer, employee, intern, or volunteer* (the "Employee"), whether part-time or full-time, currently employed by the County in any capacity who posts any material whether written, audio, video or otherwise on any website, blog or any other medium accessible via the Internet. We expect all who participate in social media on behalf of Rutherford County Government to be trained, to understand, and to follow these guidelines. Failure to do so could put your future participation at risk. These guidelines will continually evolve as new technologies and social networking tools emerge.

### DEFINITIONS

For purposes of this policy, "social media" is content created by individuals using accessible and scalable technologies through the Internet. Examples of social media include but are not limited to: Facebook, blogs, MySpace, RSS, YouTube, Second Life, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Google Wave.

**Blog:** A self-published diary or commentary on a particular topic that may allow visitors to post responses, reactions or comments. The term is short for "Web log".

**Page:** The specific portion of a social media website where content is displayed, and managed by one or more persons with administrator rights.

**Post:** Content a person shares on a social media site or the act of publishing content on a site.

**Profile:** Personal information that a user provides on a social networking site.

**Social Media:** A category of Internet-based resources that integrate user-generated content and user participation. This includes, but is not limited to, social networking sites (Facebook, Myspace), microblogging sites (Twitter, Nixle), photo and video sharing sites (Flickr, YouTube), wikis (Wikipedia), and blogs and news sites (Digg, Reddit).

**Social Networks:** Online platforms where users can create profiles, share information, and socialize with others using a range of technologies.

**Speech:** Expression or communication of thoughts or opinions in spoken words, in writing, by expressive conduct, symbolism, photographs, video or related forms of communication.

**Web 2.0:** The second generation of the World Wide Web focused on sharable, user-generated content, rather than static web pages. This term may be used interchangeably with social media.

**Wiki:** Web page(s) that can be edited collaboratively.

### GENERAL PROVISIONS

This policy shall be applied only to the extent permitted by and in a manner consistent with the United States and Tennessee Constitutions. Unless specifically instructed, employees are not authorized and therefore restricted to speak on behalf of the County. Employees may not publicly discuss other employees or any work-related matters, whether confidential or not, outside the County-authorized communications; (communications are based upon the employee's role, authority to do so, and/or positions within the county). Employees are expected to protect the privacy and non-public information of the County and its employees and are prohibited from disclosing personal employee and non-employee information and/or any other proprietary and nonpublic information to which employees have access. Any conduct that would be deemed illegal or a violation of the County's Social Media Policy "offline" will still be illegal "online".

## **RULES AND GUIDELINES**

The County maintains an online presence. A employee may not characterize himself or herself as representing the County at any time, including non-working or personal time, directly or indirectly, in any online posting unless pursuant to the written policies of the County.

All County social media sites directly or indirectly representing that they are an official site or statement of the County must be created pursuant to this policy and be approved by the appropriate department director or other designee. The County's primary and predominant Internet presence shall remain [www.rutherfordcountyttn.gov](http://www.rutherfordcountyttn.gov) and no other website, blog, or social media site shall characterize itself as being the County's primary or home Internet site.

Before any county social media site is created, the department head must submit a written request to the County Mayor and the Director of Information Technology. The County Mayor and the Director of Information Technology must approve that request and file it within the Office of Information Technology and the Human Resources Department. The request shall: (1) specify the reasons for the request; (2) describe the type of information to be provided; and (3) describe and name the persons within the department who will be responsible for the content and the upkeep of the social media site created or maintained pursuant to the request.

Whenever possible, a social media site of the County shall link or otherwise refer visitors to the County's main website. Social media pages shall state that the opinions expressed by the visitors to the page(s) do not reflect the opinions of Rutherford County Government.

In addition to this policy, all County social media sites shall comply with all applicable County policies and state laws dealing with County publications.

Employees shall not post, transmit, or otherwise disseminate via any social media form any information they have access to as a result of their employment without advance written permission from their Department Head or without completion of an "Open Records Request".

*Employees should be aware that all Internet posts are widely accessible and should therefore use discretion when choosing to share their own personal or medical information online.*

A County social media site shall contain a clear and conspicuous statement that the purpose of the site is to serve as a mechanism for communication between the County and its citizens and that all postings are subject to review by the County. The following content is not allowed and may be immediately removed:

- Comments not topically related to the particular social medium article being commented upon;
- Comments in support of or opposition to political campaigns or ballot measures;
- *Comments concerning legal matters involving the County or anyone employed or affiliated with the County;*
- *Comments that are unsubstantiated, false or libelous;*
- Profane language or content;
- Content that promotes, fosters, or perpetuates discrimination on the basis of race, creed, color, age, religion, gender, marital status, status with regard to public assistance, national origin, physical or mental disability or other legally protected classification or category;
- Sexual content or links to sexual content;
- Content that gives personal information including health information;

- Solicitations of commerce;
- Conduct or encouragement of illegal activity;
- Information that may tend to compromise the safety or security of the public or public systems; or
- Content that violates a legal ownership interest of any other party.

Without limiting the foregoing, the County reserves the right to immediately remove any other content that violates the spirit of this Policy.

Posting of content prohibited under this policy may subject the poster to banishment from all County social media sites in addition to civil and/or criminal penalties under federal and/or state law and immediate termination of employment.

The County will approach the use of social media tools, software, hardware, and applications in a manner which is consistent with all the County guidelines. All new tools, software, hardware, and applications must be approved by the Director of Information Technology or their approved designee.

For each social media tool or site approved for use in accordance with this policy, operational and use guidelines, design or "branding" standards, and processes for managing the account shall be developed and documented in writing. The County must be able to immediately edit or remove content from its social media sites.

County developed and maintained social media sites are not to be used for the purpose of running for an elected office or position.

### **PERSONAL BLOGS and SOCIAL NETWORKING ACTIVITIES**

The County respects the right of employees to use blogs and social networking sites as a medium of self-expression and public conversation and does not discriminate against employees who use these media for personal interests and affiliations or other lawful purposes. Employees are expected to follow the guidelines and policies set forth to provide a clear line between you as the individual and you as the employee.

Bloggers and commenters are personally responsible for their commentary on blogs and social networking sites. Bloggers and commenters can be held personally liable for commentary that is considered defamatory, obscene, proprietary or libelous by any offended party, not just Rutherford County Government.

Employees shall not use employer-owned equipment, (including without limitation computers, software or other electronic equipment), facilities or County time, to conduct personal blogging, or social networking activities.

Employees shall not use blogs or social networking sites to harass, threaten, or discriminate against other employees or anyone associated with or doing business with the County even during non-working hours.

If contacted by the media or press about a post that relates to County business, employees are required to contact the Mayor's office along with their supervisor before responding.

When posting in a non-official capacity on a non-County site, an employee shall not unnecessarily identify themselves as an employee of the County. However, an employee does not violate this policy by stating the type of position held and the employer's name as basic identifying information, (e.g. opening a Facebook account). When the identity of an employee posting in a non-County social media site is apparent, the employee shall clearly state

that he or she is posting in a private and/or unofficial capacity and his or her statements do not reflect the opinions of the County nor are they speaking on behalf of the County.

The use of a County email address, job title, uniform, official County name, seal, logo or letterhead shall be deemed an attempt to represent the County in an official capacity. Other communications leading an average viewer to conclude that a posting was made in an official capacity shall also be deemed an attempt to represent the County in an official capacity.

Department Heads may allow or disallow employee participation in non-County social media activities as part of their job duties in accordance with this policy and rules and guidelines developed hereunder.

Postings made in an official capacity shall be subject to the Tennessee Public Records Act, including any official postings on a non-County social media site.

An employee posting on a social media site shall take reasonable care not to disclose any confidential information or non-public information in any post (e.g. another employee's personal identifying information).

### **OPEN MEETINGS ACT**

No Commissioners of the County shall use a County owned or created social media site or a non-County social media site to discuss or deliberate any matter with another Rutherford County Commissioner when such communication is or could reasonably be deemed to be in violation of the Open Meetings Act, T.C.A. 8.- 44-101 et.seq., commonly known as "the Sunshine Law".

If you have any questions relating to this policy, your personal blog, or social networking, ask the Director of Information Technology or Director of Human Resources.

### **WHEN YOU USE**

Emerging platforms for online collaboration are fundamentally changing the way we work, offering new ways to engage with citizens, colleagues, and the world at large. New technology presents a new model for interaction and we believe social computing can help you to build stronger, more successful business relationships. It is also a way for you to take part in national and local conversations related to the work we are doing at Rutherford County Government and the things we care about.

### **If you participate in social media, please follow these guiding principles:**

- Stick to your area of expertise and provide unique, individual perspectives on what's going on in Rutherford County Government and in the world.
- Post meaningful, respectful comments – in other words, no spam, no off-topic remarks, and no offensive remarks.
- Always pause and think before posting. However, do reply to comments in a timely manner, when a response is appropriate.
- Respect proprietary information, content, and confidentiality.
- When disagreeing with others' opinions, keep it appropriate and polite.

- Negative comments or concerns should be expressed to your Department Head prior to posting. Don't be public until you have been private.
- Know and follow the Rutherford County Social Media Policy.

### **CONTRACTORS & ENDORSEMENTS**

Rutherford County Government supports transparency. We are committed to ensuring that our social media practitioners (including blogs, Facebook, Twitter, forums, and any other social media) clearly disclose relationships and endorsements, and that statements about Rutherford County Government are truthful and substantiated.

### **MONITORING**

Employees are cautioned that they should have no expectation of privacy while using the Internet at work or on work equipment. The Rutherford County Employee Handbook defines the technology expectations and rules in more detail. Your postings can be reviewed by anyone, including the County. The County reserves the right to monitor comments or discussions about the County and its employees posted on the Internet by anyone, including employees and non-employees. The County uses search tools and software to monitor forums such as blogs and other types of personal journals, diaries, personal and business discussion forums, and social networking sites. Employees are cautioned that they should have no expectation of privacy while using the County equipment, facilities, or networks for any purpose, including authorized blogging. The County reserves the right to use content management tools to monitor, review, block, or remove content on the County blogs that violate the County blogging rules and guidelines.

### **REPORTING VIOLATIONS**

The County requests and strongly urges employees to report any violations or perceived violations to Elected Officials, Directors, the Office of Information Technology, the Human Resources department of Rutherford County Government and/or the abuse and fraud hotline. Violations include discussions of Rutherford County and its employees, any discussion of proprietary information, and any unlawful activity related to blogging or social networking.

### **DISCIPLINE FOR VIOLATIONS**

The County investigates and responds to *all* reports of violations of the Social Media Policy and other related policies. Violation of the County's Social Media Policy will result in disciplinary action up to and including immediate termination (without prior warning, written or verbal). Discipline or termination will be determined based on the nature and factors of any blog or social networking post. The County reserves the right to take legal action where necessary against employees who engage in prohibited or unlawful conduct.

### **EXCEPTION PROCESS**

*If a position requires the use of Internet in order to perform essential job functions, an exception may be made on an individual basis.* Exceptions to this policy must be requested in writing to your Elected Official or Director, and the request will be escalated to the County Mayor and the Director of Information Technology. Exceptions will be documented in writing and retained according to existing retention schedules. Exceptions may be granted on a limited-time basis.

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

Employees are required to sign a written acknowledgement that they have received, read, understood, and agreed to comply with the County’s Social Media Policy and any other related policy and that implications of comments today and in the future could result to and include immediate discharge.

*By signing this form, I acknowledge that I have received a copy, either physically or electronically, of the Rutherford County Social Media Policy and Guidelines. I have read and understand the policy so that I know my rights and responsibilities as an employee or volunteer of Rutherford County Government. I also understand that I am expected to follow the policy and may contact the Office of Information Technology or Human Resources Department if I need additional information about this or any other policy or procedure of Rutherford County Government. I understand that the County has the right to modify, delete, or improve any of the policies or guidelines at any time with or without notice. It is understood that future changes in policies and guidelines will supersede or eliminate those found in this policy and guidelines and that employees will be notified of such changes through normal communication channels. I understand that the changes will apply to me regardless of whether I receive actual notice. All information contained in the policies is subject to applicable State, Federal, and Local laws, rules, and regulations. I understand that to the extent that any such laws may conflict with any provision of the policies, such laws, rules, and regulations will control.*

*I acknowledge that none of the County’s policies may be construed to create a contract of employment or any other legal obligation, express or implied, and that any policy may be amended, revised, supplemented, rescinded or otherwise altered, in whole or in part, at any time, at the sole and absolute discretion of Rutherford County.*

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**Employee Signature**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Employee Printed Name**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Department**