



## **Lincoln County Social Media Acceptable Use Policy**

**Adopted and Approved:** December 19, 2012

**Amended** on the 15<sup>th</sup> day of July, 2024.

### **POLICY / PURPOSE.**

Lincoln County recognizes that employees in some positions may need to utilize social media to connect with other organizations to better perform their duties, or to provide information regarding the services they perform. In these cases, the use of social media during the work day is acceptable.

Lincoln County also recognizes that some of our employees may choose to express themselves by posting personal information on the Internet through personal websites, blogs, or chat rooms, by uploading content, or by making comments at other websites or blogs on their own time. We respect the rights and interests of employees in engaging in these forms of personal expression on their own time, should they choose to do so. However, employees are expected to follow the guidelines and policies set forth below to provide a clear line between the employee, as an individual, and their role as an employee of Lincoln County.

Blogging or other forms of social media or technology include but are not limited to the following: video or wiki postings, sites such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, chat rooms, YouTube, TikTok, personal blogs or other similar forms of online journals, diaries or personal newsletters not affiliated with Lincoln County.

### **DEPARTMENTS WANTING TO USE SOCIAL MEDIA.**

All departments considering the development and/or administration of a social media site must submit a written proposal to the County Manager and Public Affairs Officer. The proposal must supply the following information:

- Why the social media tool is the appropriate outreach tool for the target audience.
- Which staff member(s) will be responsible for working to develop the content and design
- Which staff member(s) will be allowed administrator access to the site and be responsible for ongoing updates and monitoring
- What type of information and images will be included on the social media site
- An estimate of the number of hours per week of staff time that will be dedicated to the site
- How the site will be monitored after hours, during weekends and over holidays.
- A list of other sites/blogs that cover the same topic.
- How often posts are anticipated.
- If links to other County-sponsored networking sites or the County's official website will be provided
- How the department intends to comply with records retention requirements.

Departments Operating Social Media Sites. Any Department that is approved for the operation of a social media site, or who already operates a social media site, shall be required to provide all login information to the County Manager, Public Affairs Officer and any other County Administration required. If any password is updated, then that information shall immediately be shared with the required parties.

#### **ACCEPTABLE SOCIAL MEDIA USE AT WORK.**

All employees and departments who are users of social media for a County department must:

- Secure each social media site so that only County employees assigned by the applicable department can post to the site.
- Ensure that the site is consistent with applicable state, federal and local laws, regulations and policies. This includes any applicable Records Retention and Disposition Schedules or policies, procedures, standards or guidelines provided by the Department of Cultural Resources.
- Adhere to laws and policies regarding copyright, use of photographs, personnel privacy, First Amendment, the Americans with Disabilities Act, HIPPA and technology use policy established by the County.
- Employees representing the County on social media sites shall always conduct themselves as professional representatives of the County and in accordance with all County policies. Any employee authorized to post items on any social media site of the County, or a County department shall ensure that posting shall only reflect the views of the County and shall not express the personal views of the employee. Postings to County social media sites shall not contain any of the following:
  - Comments in support of, or opposition to, political campaigns, candidates, or ballot measures.
  - Profane language or content.
  - Content that promotes, fosters, or perpetrates discrimination in any form.
  - Sexual content or links to sexual content.
  - Solicitations of commerce.
  - Conduct or encouragement of illegal activity.
  - Content that violates any copyright, patent, or trademark.
- Comply with public record requirements for the social media sites. This means that the posts of the site administrator(s) and any permitted feedback by other employees will become part of the public record. Because others might not be aware of the public records law, the following statement should be included somewhere on the social networking site:

*“Employees and representatives of Lincoln County communicate via this site. Consequently, any communication via this site (whether by a County employee or the general public) may be subject to monitoring and disclosure to third parties pursuant to North Carolina Public Records Laws.”*

#### **EMPLOYEES USING SOCIAL MEDIA ON THEIR OWN TIME.**

Employees should be mindful of blurring their personal and professional lives when administering social media sites. Employees should be aware that personal postings will be read by not only friends and family, but possibly by co-workers, citizens, and the media.

Even if posted anonymously or under a pseudonym, your identity can be discovered relatively easily. Employees should be careful when deciding what to include in a post or comment. County employees

using social media on their own time:

- Are expected to act responsibly and exercise good judgment when interacting with social media resources.
- Should not include any information on a social media site that in any way that directly or indirectly reflects negatively on Lincoln County, their Department, their coworkers, or themselves.
- Should not post photographs or other depictions of County buildings, vehicles, uniforms, emblems, or the County Seal on internet postings, public or private without prior permission of the County Manager.
- Shall not use blogs or social networking sites to harass or threaten employees or anyone associated with or doing business with the County.
- Should understand that they are legally responsible for content they post to the Internet, in a blog or otherwise and that they may be held personally liable for defaming others and/or revealing confidential information, among other things.
- Shall not post photographs of people engaged in business with the County or at County events without prior permission of the County Manager.
- Shall not link from a personal blog or personal social networking site to the County's internal or external web sites.

Lincoln County may require immediate removal of, and impose discipline for, material that is disruptive to the workplace or impairs the mission of the County.

The following are always strictly prohibited, regardless of whether an employee is using social media for the County's official use or for non-official/personal use:

- Disclosure of confidential information which an employee has obtained because of the employee's role or duties for the County. Confidential information includes information that an employee knows is confidential or has reason to believe is confidential. Examples of such information are a vendor's proprietary information of which the employee has knowledge due to his/her assignment on a County project; personal, confidential, or health information about someone; information from an employee's or applicant's personnel file; billing information of customers compiled and maintained by the County; or any data collected from a person applying for financial or other types of assistance or service including, but not limited to, their income, bank accounts, savings account, or other financial accounts.
- Disclosure of non-public information or legally protected information to which an employee has access or has obtained from the County such as a person's address, date of birth, driver's license number, social security number, or other personal information.
- Disclosure of non-public records/information related to criminal investigations.

This is a representative list and does not include all prohibitions that may violate State law or County policies and procedures. Violations of these restrictions may be cause for disciplinary action by the County, up to and including termination.

#### **ENFORCEMENT OF THIS POLICY.**

Employees are cautioned that they should have no expectation of privacy while using the Internet. Your

postings can be reviewed by anyone, including Lincoln County Management. The County reserves the right to monitor comments or discussions on the internet about the County and its employees. The County may use blog-search tools and software to monitor forums such as blogs and other types of personal journals, diaries and personal and business discussion forums.

Violations may result in disciplinary action, including termination or any other action deemed necessary under this policy governing misuse of County equipment or under the Lincoln County disciplinary policy.

All rules that are outlined in the Lincoln County Information Technology –Technology Resources Acceptable Use Policy also apply to the use of social media.

### **PUBLIC COMMENTS ON COUNTY SITES.**

Any County social media sites that allow for public comments or postings shall be subject to the following guidelines:

- Views and opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not reflect those of Lincoln County, or any department of Lincoln County, officials or employees.
- Individuals who comment on any post, or on the general page of Lincoln County, or a department of Lincoln County, shall have no expectation of privacy. Moreover, any postings or comments are considered public records and shall be retained and subject to disclosure in accordance with applicable laws and Lincoln County policies.
- County social media policies are subject to amendment or modification at any time.
- Public users should not use any social media site maintained by the County, or one of its departments, for emergency communications or when another form of communication or notification is required.

The following **Rules of Use** shall apply to, and shall be posted on, all County social media sites:

This site is a moderated discussion site and is subject to North Carolina public record and e-discovery laws. Lincoln County (the “County”) reserves the right to delete or hide submissions that violate these Rules of Use. All comments on this site must pertain to items within the jurisdictional control or authority of the County. The following are examples of unacceptable comments and content. This list is not intended to be all-inclusive:

- Any comments or content that does not relate to the jurisdiction or authority of the County, including but not limited to spam, materially deficient memes/gifs, or similar.
- Profane or obscene language as determined by this social media platform’s profanity filters (such posts will be blocked through the platform’s profanity filter).
- Content that promotes, fosters, or perpetrates discrimination based on race, color, sex (including pregnancy, gender identity, and sexual orientation), national origin, religion, disability, age, genetic information, military or veteran status, or any other classification protected by applicable Federal, State, and local laws.
- Solicitations of commerce and/or content containing gratuitous links (links to other relevant governmental webpages or official government sites are acceptable).
- Promotions or content related to political organizations of any type.
- Advocation of illegal activity, services, or products or those that compromise the safety or

security of the public.

- Infringement on intellectual property.
- Confidential or non-public information, including but not limited to, personally identifiable information, and content that violates the legal rights of the owner of said content.
- Information that may: compromise the security of public systems, including uploading files that contain viruses or corrupted files; compromise any criminal/civil investigations; or violate this social media platform's Terms of Use.

All comments that are blocked, hidden, or removed shall be retained as required by North Carolina law.

**For More Information,** Contact the Public Affairs Officer at 704-479-5050.