



CITY OF INVER GROVE HEIGHTS

POLICY FOR COMMUNICATIONS AND SOCIAL MEDIA

SUMMARY

Social media is gaining popularity in private, non-profit and public sector communications. City participation in social media may fall into one of two categories – professional participation in city developed and managed social media sites and professional participation in social media outlets not managed by the city. Development and use of social media to promote city programs and services needs approval from the Assistant City Administrator and must demonstrate alignment with established communications strategies. Professional participation in social media where an employee is representing the City of Inver Grove Heights must be authorized by the employee's direct supervisor.

PURPOSE

The City of Inver Grove Heights strives to provide the public with accurate and timely information, communicated in a professional manner, and in accordance with the laws regarding public information and data practices.

This policy provides guidelines for all external communications from the City using various mediums including:

- Printed materials such as newsletters, articles and brochures.
- Electronic materials such as email, postings to web sites or social media sites.
- Media relations such as requests for interviews, news releases and media inquiries.

Social media is popular in private, non-profit and public sector communications. While social media may present new avenues for communication the City of Inver Grove Heights wants to ensure that social media tools are treated with the same consideration as traditional methods of communications – being used only when it is an appropriate method to reach desired goals and outcomes.

The City also recognizes that employees may sometimes comment on city matters outside of their official role as an employee of the City of Inver Grove Heights. Therefore, this policy also provides guidelines for employees when communicating as a private citizen on matters pertaining to city business.

GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR ALL COMMUNICATIONS (OFFICIAL AND PERSONAL)

All City employees have a responsibility to help communicate accurate and timely information to the public in a professional manner. Any employee who identifies a mistake in reporting should bring the error to their Supervisor or other appropriate supervisory staff. Regardless of whether the communication is in the employee's official city role or in a personal capacity, employees must comply with all laws related to trademark, copyright, software use, etc. Employees must also follow all City policies that may apply. Examples of relevant policies include:

- **Technology and Computer Use Policy.** For example, City employees may use City technology for personal reasons on a limited basis provided it doesn't interfere with normal work. The City reserves the right to inspect any electronic data made by a City-owned computer or related system. This policy should be reviewed and complied with in full.
- **Respectful Workplace Policy.** For example, employees cannot publish information that is discriminatory, harassing, threatening or sexually explicit. This policy should be reviewed and complied with in full.
- **Data Practices Policy.** For example, employees cannot disclose private or confidential information and must route data practices requests to the responsible authority. This policy should be reviewed and complied with in full.
- **Political Activity Policy.** For example, employees cannot use City resources or participate in personal political activity while on City time or while discharging City responsibilities. No employee may act in a manner that suggests that the City either supports a particular political issue, or endorses the personal political opinions of the employee. This policy should be reviewed and complied with in full.

ADDITIONAL GUIDELINES FOR OFFICIAL CITY COMMUNICATIONS

Handling General Requests

All staff is responsible for communicating basic and routine information to the public in relation to their specific job duties. Requests for private data or information outside the scope of an individual's job duties should be routed to the appropriate department or to the data practices authority.

Handling Media Requests

With the exception of routine events and basic information that is readily available to the public, all requests for interviews or information from the media are to be routed through the City Administrator. Media requests include anything intended to be published or viewable to others in some form such as television, radio, newspapers, newsletters, and web sites. When responding to media requests, employees should follow these steps:

1. If the request is for routine or public information (such as meeting time or agenda) provide the information.
2. If the request is regarding information about City personnel, potential litigation, controversial issues, an opinion on a City matter, or if you are unsure if it is a "routine" question, forward the request to the City Administrator. An appropriate response would be, "I'm sorry, I don't have the full information regarding that issue. Let me take some basic information and submit your request to the appropriate person who will get back to you as soon as he/she can."
3. Ask the media representative's name, specific question, deadline and contact information.

Development and use of city managed social media

Development and use of city managed social media must be approved by the Assistant City Administrator. This approval can happen in one of two ways. Communication may include social media in an strategic communications plan for a specific department or initiative. If social

media is not included in an existing strategic communications plan, the department or initiative must submit a business case for development and use to the Assistant City Administrator. A complete business case must include:

- **Need and justification for using social media** – What will the use of social media achieve that is not currently or could not be achieved through existing communications methods? What is the challenge that using social media will overcome and how will social media work to overcome that challenge more effectively than other communication tools?
- **Main purpose** – What on a broad scale are you are trying to do. For example, inform an audience, drive an audience to take action i.e. participate in a program or service, increase awareness.
- **Goal(s)** – What specifically are you trying to achieve through the use of social media? Good goals will be tangible and measurable. For example, to increase program attendance by 10 percent, to increase facility use by five percent, to increase participation by 15 percent.
- **Target audience(s)** – Who specifically are you trying to reach: existing or new participants; teens, adults, children; men, women; stakeholders. The “general public” is not an acceptable target audience.
- **Message(s)** – What do you want the target audience to know?
- **Social media tool(s) to be developed/used** – What tools will you use i.e. blog, Facebook, wiki, etc.?
- **Description of tool(s) if not outlined in this policy** – What category of tool is it (i.e. blog, message board, content sharing site, etc.), how does participation take place, what kinds of information are shared, what is the role of the content/site administrator, etc.?
- **Outreach proposal** – How do you propose to drive people to the social media tool(s) to participate?
- **Work plan (workflow, content creation, timelines/schedules, staff allocation, etc.)** – Who from your department will be the project lead? Who will be responsible for content creation? What kind of content will be included? When and how will content be created and approved? How much staff time do you anticipate devoting to this social media tool? What other departments (apart from Communications) need to be involved in creation or approval of content?
- **Measures and evaluation methods** – How are you going to measure whether or not the identified social media tool(s) is successful? And, what are the timelines for evaluation?

Single representation of department or initiative

Only one social media site of a specific kind – i.e. Facebook – will be developed per department or initiative. For instance, multiple Facebook sites for parks and recreation activities (i.e. youth activities, park activities) is not acceptable. The parks and recreation Facebook will promote all parks and recreation programs and activities.

Social Media Site Standards

1. Social media sites must be monitored daily during working hours to ensure the comments meet certain criteria. Procedures will be put in place to ensure these standards are met. Some

mediums such as Facebook allow instant commenting while others like YouTube allow for a moderated/approved process.

2. City-created social media forums (blogs, message boards, etc.) must be structured narrowly to focus discussions on particular services, projects and programs of the City of Inver Grove Heights rather than creating a “public forum” of broad topic areas. In these forums, the City determines the topic and direction of the forum in order to create a more purposeful conversation.

For example, if a transportation blog was created, entries must be focused on specific projects and issues as opposed to broad topics like the benefits of transportation.

3. The City will remove postings that do not meet the narrow focus of a City media forum.

4. All sections of social media Web sites that allow comments must include either a link to the following comments policy published on the public Web site or the complete text published on the social media site:

The purpose of this site is to present matters of public interest in the City of Inver Grove Heights, including its many residents, businesses and visitors. We encourage you to submit your questions, comments and concerns, but please note this is a moderated online discussion site and not a public forum.

Once posted, the City reserves the right to delete submissions that contain vulgar language, personal attacks of any kind, or offensive comments that target or disparage any ethnic, racial, or religious group. Further, the City also reserves the right to delete comments that are:

- Spam or include links to other sites
- Clearly off topic
- Advocate illegal activity
- Promote particular services, products, or political organizations
- Infringe on copyrights or trademarks

Please note that the comments expressed on this site do not reflect the opinions and position of the City of Inver Grove Heights government or its officers and employees. If you have any questions concerning the operation of this social media site, please contact the City at cityhall@invergroveheights.org.

5. Links to more information should direct users back to the City’s official Web site for information, forms, documents or online services necessary to conduct business with the City unless otherwise agreed to by department representative and the City Administrator.

Communicating on behalf of the City

The City Administrator and Department Heads are authorized to communicate on behalf of the City in interviews, publications, news releases, on social media sites, and related communications. Other employees may represent the City if approved by one of these individuals to communicate on a specific topic. When speaking on behalf of the City:

- Employees must identify themselves as representing the City. Account names on social media sites must clearly be connected to the City and approved by the Assistant City Administrator.

- All information must be respectful, professional and truthful. Corrections must be issued when needed.
- Personal opinions generally don't belong in official City statements. One exception is communication related to promoting a City service. For example, if an employee posted on the City's Facebook page, "My family and I visited Hill Park this weekend and really enjoyed the new band shelter." Employees who have been approved to use social media sites on behalf of the City should seek assistance from the Assistant City Administrator.
- Employees need to notify their Department Head if they will be using their personal technology (cell phones, home computer, cameras, etc) for city business. Employees should be aware that the data transmitted or stored may be subject to the data practices act.

ADDITIONAL GUIDELINES FOR PERSONAL COMMUNICATIONS

It is important for employees to remember that the personal communications of employees may reflect on the City, especially if employees are commenting on city business. The following guidelines apply to personal communications including various forms such as social media (Facebook, Twitter, blogs, YouTube, etc) letters to the editor of newspapers, and personal endorsements.

- Remember that what you write is public, and will be so for a long time. It may also be spread to large audiences. Use common sense when using email or social media sites. It is a good idea to refrain from sending or posting information that you would not want your boss or other employees to read, or that you would be embarrassed to see in the newspaper.
- The City of Inver Grove Heights expects its employees to be truthful, courteous and respectful towards supervisors, co-workers, citizens, customers and other persons associated with the City. Do not engage in name-calling, or personal attacks.
- If you publish something related to City business, identify yourself and use a disclaimer such as, "I am an employee of the City of Inver Grove Heights. However, these are my own opinions and do not represent those of the City of Inver Grove Heights."
- City resources, working time, or official City positions cannot be used for personal profit or business interests, or to participate in personal political activity. For example, a building inspector could not use the City's logo, email, or working time to promote his/her side business as a plumber.
- Personal social media account names or email names should not be tied to the City (e.g. MosquitoHeightsCop)

QUESTIONS

Questions related to this policy should be directed to the Assistant City Administrator or your Department Head.