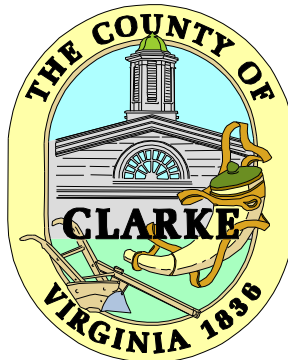


Social Media Policy

Clarke County, Virginia Public Information Office

Social Media Policy



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Overview

Social media are fundamentally different than mainstream media and have their own unique issues. For example, social media platforms are always on, creating a new set of demands for employees who manage accounts for Clarke County, Va. However, social media also provide a greater degree of openness and transparency, making it possible for county employees and elected officials to receive input — both positive and negative — from the people affected by government decisions.

By using social media, residents can contribute to the policy development process. Clarke County government turned a traditionally one-way communication activity into a two-way or even multi-way interaction, thus creating opportunities for the government to engage with the community it serves.

Social media cannot replace other forms of communication, and there are risks associated with using it. Nevertheless, Clarke County employees and officials can minimize problems by adhering to this Clarke County Social Media Policy to manage accounts for maximum benefit and legal compliance.

1. Introduction

The purpose of this policy is to set the framework, requirements and processes that form the basis of how Clarke County uses social media to interact and engage with its residents, visitors and the global community.

This policy includes guidelines for maintaining official county social media accounts and content that reflects Clarke County values as well as its expectations regarding how county employees comport themselves on social media platforms.

The Board of Supervisors, County Administrator and Director of Public Information will be responsible for ensuring adherence to this policy and reviewing it on a regular basis.

1.1. Background

Social media are acceptable methods of communication in the 21st century. Social media afford local governments the opportunity to engage with users in a personal and more direct approach, narrowing the gap between local government and the community. Social media

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includes but is not limited to Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube and Flickr.

By adopting social media as forms of communication, Clarke County can better inform, understand, respond to and attract the attention of specific audiences. It enables interactive communication not possible via other platforms such as newspapers, television or radio. Social media create the opportunity for joint responsibility and participation between Clarke County and its residents. Responsiveness, openness and mutual respect are essential at all times.

1.2. Purpose

The purpose of Clarke County, Va., social media is to:

- connect Clarke County government with the constituents it serves in a cost-effective way that strengthens and promotes good relationships,
- improve information delivery,
- provide real-time interaction, and
- promote Clarke County's identity, culture and values (also known as brand).

1.3. Goals

The primary goals of using social media are:

- increase awareness of county services,
 - increase awareness of county policies,
 - promotes government meetings and county events,
 - consult and engage with specific target groups,
 - complement the existing communication methods and processes,
 - provide additional platforms through which Clarke County government keeps abreast of taxpayer and general public comments and perceptions regarding the county,
 - quickly disseminate urgent information,
 - correct misinformation, remedy mistakes or alter services to build strong relationships,
 - provide more methods by which stakeholders can engage with the county, and educate.
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2. Social Media Accounts Management

The nature of social media requires frequent posting and responsiveness, so it is not feasible for every post or response to go through a comprehensive approval process. However, all information should be verified, accurate and — if necessary — checked by the appropriate director prior to posting. Employees who are responsible for maintaining social media accounts should exercise good judgment in accordance with this Clarke County Social Media Policy. When in doubt, contact the Clarke County Director of Public Information.

- 2.1. All official Clarke County social media accounts and websites — and all their content — belong to Clarke County regardless of who originally created the accounts and/or content.
 - 2.2. The Director of Public Information manages content on official “Clarke County, Virginia” accounts with oversight provided by the County Administrator.
 - 2.3. The Director of Public Information monitors all official Clarke County accounts and reports data to the County Administrator. Rarely used accounts or those that do not advance the county’s goals will be deactivated.
 - 2.4. All official Clarke County social media accounts must have at least three administrators: the primary site administrator, the Director of Public Information and the County Administrative Assistant. The primary administrator may add other employees as administrators.
 - 2.5. Social media administrators must be immediately removed from accounts when they leave the employment of Clarke County.
 - 2.6. All government departments may submit content for official “Clarke County, Virginia” social media platforms to the Director of Public Information for approval and posting. Some content may require additional approval by the County Administrator or Board of Supervisors.
 - 2.7. The Director of Public Information will respond to positive or negative developments from engagement via social media accounts on the respective social media platforms when such responses are required.
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- 2.8.** Social media account administrators will have the necessary technology to manage accounts, and they are encouraged to utilize the skills of the Director of Public Information in order to reflect the Clarke County brand in their work. *(Note: A “Clarke County Editorial and Graphics Style Manual” will be developed in 2018.)*
- 2.9.** Posting is forever. Text, images and videos on official Clarke County sites cannot be deleted. This includes comments posted by others. *(See section 5, “Social Media Content Guidelines.”)*
- 2.10.** Social media sites must comply with applicable federal, state and local laws, regulations and policies. That means:
- Content management must adhere to established laws and policies regarding copyright, records retention, Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), First Amendment, privacy laws and information security policies established by Clarke County.
 - All content on official Clarke County social media sites is archived for the county government by an outside vendor.
 - Posts deemed technically harmful or inappropriate shall be promptly documented and saved according to record retention guidelines and may be removed only after consultation with the County Administrator and/or Director of Public Information.
- 2.11.** The county’s website — www.clarkecounty.gov — remains the primary online source of all official county information. Social media accounts exist to complement the website and enhance communication.
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3. Social Media Code of Conduct

Nothing about social media changes the responsibilities and obligations of Clarke County government employees with regard to their private accounts or access to social media outside of work hours; the county employees’ Code of Conduct applies. No employee or elected/appointed official is permitted to share:

- content that is unlawful, defamatory, racist, sexist, homophobic or insulting,
 - content that is harassing, threatening, obscene, pornographic, indecent, lewd, foul language, suggestive or otherwise objectionable,
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- anything that is untrue,
 - content, including photos and videos, that features explicit political messages,
 - content that criticizes individual community members, co-workers or elected officials by name,
 - content that infringes on the privacy of others, and/or
 - unsolicited sales messages (spam).
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3.1. All Clarke County, Va., Government Employees:

- Employees may not do anything on social media that damages or tarnishes the reputation of Clarke County; employees must always act in its best interests of the county. For example, county employees may not negatively comment on social media about issues associated with Clarke County government.
 - Everything Clarke County employees do and say on social media reflects the county's reputation. Use sound judgment and common sense, act with professionalism and integrity and adhere to Clarke County's values.
 - Employees who violate any terms in this policy will be subject to disciplinary action.
 - Do not use the official Clarke County seal on any personal social media site.
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3.2. Clarke County, Va., Elected and Appointed Officials:

- Elected and appointed representatives may not use their county government titles for any personal social media accounts. For instance, personal accounts for "Supervisor John Doe" or "Commissioner Mary Smith" are prohibited.
 - Campaigning is restricted to personal social media accounts. Official Clarke County social media sites will never share or endorse any political content.
 - Clarke County elected officials should refrain from divulging administrative information via social media platforms regarding government-related issues that are not finalized. Official county business must first be clarified and verified by the County Administrator before being made public.
 - Everything Clarke County elected officials do and say on social media reflects the county's reputation. Use sound judgment and
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common sense, act with professionalism and integrity and adhere to the county's values.

- Do not use the official Clarke County seal on any personal social media site.
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4. Public Comments on Clarke County Social Media Sites

Clarke County invites all stakeholders — residents, visitors, businesses, potential residents and prospective businesses — to share opinions and feedback.

- 4.1. Some level of criticism is expected, and it presents an opportunity to participate in the conversation, correct misinformation and deliver good customer service. Respond to negative comments with constructive feedback rather than censorship. When in doubt, contact the Clarke County Director of Public Information.
 - 4.2. It is sometimes appropriate, within the professional judgement of the Board of Supervisors, County Administrator and Director of Public Information to allow public commentary to take its course without county intervention.
 - 4.3. Some negative comments may need a private response via telephone or email to avoid prolonged negative conversations in a public forum.
 - 4.4. Response to service issues or general questions require prompt replies in order to mitigate any frustrations and provide good customer service.
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5. Social Media Content Guidelines

Clarke County social media content must not discriminate in any way and should not reflect a bias. County employees must remain impartial yet informative when communicating with the public. It is essential that information shared on various social media platforms is not sensitive or confidential in any way. County employees should refer to internal departmental policies and guidelines regarding what may or may not be confidential information.

In addition to the "Clarke County Editorial and Graphics Style Manual" (to be developed in 2018), use these general editorial and graphics guidelines for all official Clarke County social media posts.

- All content on official Clarke County social media sites should advance the goals of Clarke County.
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- Do not post or share content that is unrelated to Clarke County.
 - Do not post or share content that appears to endorse a religion or political affiliation.
 - Think before sharing content from one official Clarke County page to another because comments and replies become part of the official social media archive, too. Is the employee sharing content informed enough to reply to comments and questions? Is the content appropriate for another page? Is there value in sharing the content?
 - Use a light, friendly tone when appropriate.
 - Avoid using jargon or acronyms not generally understood by the public.
 - Use proper names and job titles for county employees and elected officials; do not use nicknames or abbreviations.
 - Use proper names of county roads, e.g. U.S. 50 (John Mosby Highway), Va. 7 (Harry Byrd Highway), U.S. 340 (Lord Fairfax Highway in county; Buckmarsh Street through Berryville), etc. Not all roads are "routes."
 - Do not use emoticons or more than one exclamation point.
 - Try to limit posts to one or two sentences. Photos are worth a thousand words.
 - Ideally, photos should be taken by county employees and must not appear to promote any professional photography business.
 - Avoid using clipart and stock photos.
 - Never use copyrighted material without written permission.
 - Do not post any photographs, videos or specific information pertaining to accidents, incidents, investigations or anything related to law enforcement, fire and rescue or emergency medical services without permission from the County Administrator, the Clarke County Sheriff, the Director of Clarke County Fire, EMS and Emergency Management and/or the Director of Public Information.
 - Use great care not to post photos that reveal personal details about individuals such as license plates numbers, house numbers, etc.
 - Use great care not to post unflattering photos of individuals.
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- Ask parents for permission before taking photos of their small children, and do not take or post images of children that could be perceived as inappropriate.
 - Consistently use hashtags such as #clarkecountyva and #clarkecounty.
 - Direct readers to the official Clarke County government website as much as possible.
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6. Use of Recording Devices in Government Meetings

Media representatives or members of the public who are present in government meetings may wish to record the proceedings. Because these meetings are held to conduct county business, the public has a right to be present. Virginia law allows for any person to photograph, film, record or otherwise reproduce any portion of a public meeting. The government body conducting the meeting may adopt rules regarding the placement and use of equipment necessary for broadcasting, photographing, filming or recording a meeting to prevent interference with the proceedings, but may not prohibit or otherwise prevent any person from recording a meeting.

- 6.1.** Individuals participating in meetings — elected and appointed officials, county employees, etc. — must be aware that mobile devices with internet access and cameras are capable of publicly sharing information in real time.

End of document.