



Social Media Policy

Purpose:

The Town of Hardwick recognizes the value of social media platforms in enhancing communication, transparency, and public engagement. This policy provides guidelines for the responsible use of social media by town officials, departments, and employees, ensuring that online communication reflect the Town's values and commitments to the public.

1. Scope

This policy applies to all employees, departments, and officials of the Town of Hardwick using social media for official town business. It includes but is not limited to social media platforms such as Facebook, X, Instagram, and YouTube.

2. Official Social Media Accounts

- All social media accounts for official town use must be authorized by the Town Manager or designated officials.
- Official social media accounts will be used to provide accurate, timely information about town events, policies, services, and other matters of public interest.
- Content shared on official accounts must align with the Town's goals of transparency, civic engagement, and public service.

3. General Guidelines for Social Media Use

- **Professionalism:** Posts on official social media accounts should be respectful, factual, and professional. Content should reflect the values of the Town of Hardwick, promoting a positive image of the town and its employees.
- **Tone:** The tone should be friendly, approachable, and inclusive; keeping in mind that social media is an open space for community engagement.
- **Accuracy:** All posts must be accurate and, when applicable, verified before being shared. If mistakes are made in a post, they should be corrected promptly.
- **Consistency:** Content should be consistent with the Town's mission, goals, and policies. Messaging should be clear and concise.
- **Confidentiality:** Never post confidential or private information, including personal information about individuals or internal matters related to town business that is not meant for public disclosure.

4. Personal Use of Social Media by Employees

- While employees are encouraged to use social media in their personal time, they should refrain from using their official titles or positions in a way that may imply the Town's endorsement of personal views or opinions.
- Employees should not engage in personal social media activity during work hours unless it is relevant to their official duties.
- Employees should not engage in personal social media activity that could damage the reputation of the Town of Hardwick or its officials.

5. Content Moderation

- The Town's official social media accounts will allow for public comments. However, the Town reserves the right to remove or moderate comments that are:
 - Offensive, discriminatory, or threatening.
 - Spam or promotional content.
 - Irrelevant or off-topic.
 - In violation of any applicable laws or regulations.
- Comments that are removed will be logged to ensure transparency.

6. Crisis Communication and Emergency Management

- Social media accounts will be used to provide emergency alerts and important public safety information. This includes weather-related emergencies, town services disruptions, or other critical updates.
- Posts related to emergencies will prioritize the public's need for clear, accurate, and timely information.

7. Privacy and Security

- Town of Hardwick employees managing social media accounts must ensure that their accounts are secure, using strong passwords and regularly reviewing security settings.
- Do not share private, personal, or sensitive information on social media. Any communication that requires personal data exchange should be conducted through appropriate, secure channels.

8. Third-Party Content

- The Town of Hardwick may share third-party content that is relevant to its mission, including posts from local businesses, nonprofits, or other public agencies. However, the Town does not endorse or guarantee the accuracy of any third-party content unless explicitly stated.
- When sharing third-party content, always credit the original source.

9. Compliance with Laws and Regulations

- All social media activities must comply with applicable laws, including the Vermont Public Records Act, copyright laws, and any other relevant regulations.

- Social media content created by Town employees is considered a public record and may be subject to disclosure under public records requests.

10. Monitoring and Reporting

- Social media accounts will be regularly monitored by designated Town employees to ensure compliance with this policy.
- Employees who notice any violations of this policy should report them to the Town Manager or Social Media Administrator for investigation and resolution.

11. Training and Resources

- Employees who manage social media accounts on behalf of the Town will receive regular training on best practices, ethics, and legal considerations related to social media use.
- Resources and guidelines will be provided to help employees use social media in a professional and effective manner.

12. Policy Review

- This policy will be reviewed annually by the Town Manager to ensure it remains up to date with emerging trends in social media, technology, and legal requirements.

Acknowledgement:

By using social media on behalf of the Town of Hardwick, employees acknowledge they have read, understood, and agree to adhere to this policy.

Adopted this 6th day of February, 2025.

Town of Hardwick Select Board:

Addendum A: Acknowledgement of Municipal Employee

I, _____, acknowledge that:

- A. I have received a copy of the Town of Hardwick’s Social Media Policy on _____ and it is my responsibility to familiarize myself with its contents;
- B. I understand that it is my responsibility to ask questions if there is anything in the policy that I do not understand;
- C. I understand that this policy replaces any and all prior versions and that the Town of Hardwick reserves the right to add, amend or discontinue any of the provisions of this policy for any reason or none at all, in whole or in part, at any time, with or without notice;
- D. I acknowledge that I understand this policy and I agree that I will comply with all its provisions.

Municipal Employee’s Signature

Date