

INTERNAL POLICY FOR GOVERNING ROCKDALE COUNTY SOCIAL MEDIA

1. Purpose

To enhance the overall communication of news and ongoing events within Rockdale County with our citizens and other stakeholders who may utilize social media, Rockdale County has developed and maintains County specific social media accounts which are designed to facilitate the timely and accurate distribution of public information relative to our work and mission. We rely on our own free speech rights to communicate our selected messages.

Rockdale County is committed to full compliance of the Freedom of Speech clause of the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution and other similar legal obligations surrounding free speech. In accordance with the law, we recognize that there may be times when what some may perceive as offensive comments posted by members of the public will remain visible on our social media posts, if such comments are classified as legally protected speech.

Rockdale County strives to ensure accuracy and consistency of information associated with our social media sites. The terms and conditions contained herein establish general guidelines supporting the use of social media on official Rockdale County social media sites.

2. SCOPE

This policy applies to all Rockdale County employees and leaders in Rockdale County Departments who are responsible for maintaining official Rockdale County Social Media sites. This policy does not apply to elected officials. If you have questions regarding this policy, please immediately contact the Rockdale County Public Relations Director or their designated representative for assistance.

3. Definitions

1. "Social media" means digital content created by Rockdale County, and communicated on platforms that allow sharing, commenting, and engagement with the public. Examples of social media accounts Rockdale County may use include Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, and LinkedIn.
2. "Comments" refers to any digital content, information, links, images, videos, or any other form of communicative content posted in reply or response to a social media account post posted by Rockdale County on one of our social media sites.
3. "User" means a member of the public who directly views or directly interacts with one or more of our social media accounts.

4. Policy

- 4.1 Rockdale County supports the use of social media to communicate directly with the public, stakeholders, partners, and the media about Rockdale County matters of public interest.
- 4.2 Official Rockdale County use of social media is intended to broaden the reach of communication and engagement with the community.

4.3 All official Rockdale County social media use will be treated as a public communications tool and will be used to:

- 4.3.1 Enhance and encourage external communications.
- 4.3.2 Educate the public regarding Rockdale County services, programs, meetings, and events.
- 4.3.3 Increase government transparency and efficiency.
- 4.3.4 Engage the public in community dialogue.
- 4.3.5 Respond to inquiries regarding Rockdale County services and government.
- 4.3.6 Share posts from Rockdale County Departments' social media sites to further promote their programs, events, and services.
- 4.3.7 Communicate with the public during inclement weather, emergencies, and man-made disasters; and
- 4.3.8 Expand public interactivity and participation through online services and resources.

5. SITE CREATION AND ADMINISTRATION

5.1 Coordination with the Public Relations Department

5.1.1 Requests for the creation of all Rockdale County Departmental social media sites representing Rockdale County will be submitted in writing by the requesting Department Head/Director with a detailed explanation of the submitting Department's justification and need to Rockdale County's Public Relations Department. No new social media sites or accounts will be created or authorized without prior approval from Public Relations.

5.1.2 Departments authorized to use official Rockdale County social media sites will provide account access to the Director and/or designated Public Relations Department staff at least thirty (30) days prior to the public launch of all official Rockdale County social media sites.

5.1.3 Social media accounts developed and maintained on behalf of Rockdale County will include an accurate listing of the representative department's designated Rockdale County e-mail address.

5.1.4 Social media accounts developed and maintained on behalf of Rockdale County will not customize filters set by the platform without prior consultation and approval from Rockdale County's Public Relations Director and Rockdale County's Attorney to ensure adherence to all laws associated with protected speech (e.g., filters that may inadvertently negatively filtering out protected speech.)

5.2 Role of Social Media Administrators

5.2.1 Each Rockdale County Department that has been approved and authorized to maintain a Rockdale County social media presence will designate no less than 1, but no more than 2 employees to serve as their Rockdale County Social Media Administrators with the primary responsibility of proactively and effectively managing that specific Department's social media site. Each designated Social Media Administrator will attend periodic training scheduled and coordinated by Rockdale County's Public Relations Department. If a department's social media administrator is leaving or not longer acting in that capacity the department should notify Public Relations of changes.

5.2.2 The duties and responsibilities of the Rockdale County Social Media Administrator include serving as the lead contact for an account, developing the engagement framework for posting information and responding to comments, adhering to policies, and ensuring the social media site is regularly updated. Rockdale County's Public Relations Department will maintain a list of current approved and authorized Rockdale County social media accounts depicting the designated department contact's information (e.g., name, office extension, Rockdale County email address, etc.).

5.2.3 The Rockdale County Social Media Administrators must immediately notify/inform/contact their Rockdale County Department Head of any and all security breaches; and the Rockdale County Department Head must immediately notify both Rockdale County's Public Relations Department and Rockdale County's Technology Services of the alleged breach.

5.3 Role of Public Relations Department

5.3.1 Rockdale County's Public Relations Department will provide and approve the umbrella framework designed to support all of Rockdale County's social media presence. As such, Rockdale County's Public Relations Department will:

1. Serve as a silent administrator of all Rockdale County social media accounts.
2. Coordinate Rockdale County communication and public notification during County-wide emergencies.
3. Provide feedback and continuous training for Rockdale County Social Site Administrators, Rockdale County staff, and Leadership as needed; and
4. Prepare and disseminate new guidelines in accordance with changes to social media platforms.

6. SOCIAL MEDIA ADMINISTRATOR GUIDELINES FOR POSTING SOCIAL MEDIA CONTENT

6.1 What to Post:

6.1.1 Official Rockdale County Social Media Sites must provide clear, accurate communication in accordance with best practices for posting updates.

6.1.2 Communication principles will incorporate information that is:

1. Relevant to Rockdale County Government: Information that informs and educates the public, and pertains to their daily lives.
2. Timely: Information about deadlines or upcoming or current events.
3. Actionable: Information designed to support the public's ability to timely register, attend, go, or do activities within Rockdale County.

6.2 What Not to Post:

6.2.1 Information about matters in litigation or about potential legal claims.

6.2.2 The intellectual property of others without written permission.

6.2.3 Defamatory material.

6.2.4 Personal, sensitive, or confidential information of any kind;

6.2.5 Medical information that violates a person's Health Insurance Portability and Accountability (HIPPA) protections;

6.2.6 Obscene, pornographic or other illegal materials;

6.2.7 Racist, sexist, and other disparaging language about a group of people.

6.2.8 Sexual comments about, or directed to, anyone.

6.2.9 Political campaign materials or comments.

6.2.10 Threatening or harassing comments.

6.2.11 Other information that is not public in nature.

7. COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC ON OFFICIAL ROCKDALE COUNTY SOCIAL MEDIA SITES

7.1 Comments from the public are welcome on social media sites but comments should be routinely monitored during working hours to ensure they meet certain criteria.

7.2 Rockdale County created social media forums will be structured to focus discussions on a particular designated interest within Rockdale County rather than creating a "public forum."

7.3 Rockdale County Social Media Administrators may remove postings based on the guidelines set forth below in Section 7.6.

7.4 Public comments will not be removed solely because a commenter expresses disagreement with a Rockdale County policy or action.

7.5 All sections of Rockdale County Social Media Sites that allow/accept public comments must include a link to Rockdale County's Social Media Terms of Use Policy which is conveniently located on Rockdale County's website.

7.6 Criteria for Removal of Public Comments

Once posted, the Social Media Administrator, or his/her authorized designee, may remove from public view the following types of public comments:

7.6.1 Obscene, sexual, or pornographic content; or other illegal materials

7.6.2 Threats to any person

7.6.3 Sexual comments about, or directed to, anyone.

7.6.4 Comments or content that promotes, fosters, or perpetuates discrimination based on race, creed, color, age, religion, gender, marital status, genetics, status regarding public assistance, national origin, physical or intellectual disability, or sexual orientation.

7.6.5 Spam or unrelated links to other sites.

7.6.6 Comments that are unrelated to the County topic that is the subject of the post.

7.6.7 Comments that advocate illegal activity.

7.6.8 Comments that promote non-County services or products or promotion of commercial activities.

7.6.9 Comments that infringe on copyrights or trademarks.

7.6.10 Comments that disclose personally identifiable information that may compromise an individual's financial or personal security, including social security numbers, passwords, or credit card information; and

7.6.11 Comments that contain information that may compromise the safety, security, or proceedings of public systems or any criminal or civil investigations.

7.7 Procedure for Removal of Public Comments

7.7.1 The Rockdale County Social Media Administrators shall be aware of and knowledgeable that some social media platforms do not allow removal of posts and/or comments. Subsequently, the Rockdale County Social Media Administrator may not have the ability to remove content that is deemed inappropriate as defined in the criteria set forth in section 7.6. The Rockdale County Social Media Administrators may, in the exercise of their discretion, report any violation of a social media platform's standards, rules or guidelines to such social media entity with the intent that such entity will take appropriate and responsive action to remove the comment. Rockdale County Social Media Administrators will follow the procedures below when considering the removal of public comments.

7.7.2 Comments that fall within the scope of any of the criteria set forth in Section 7.6 are subject to removal by Rockdale County Social Media Administrators. When a Rockdale County Social Media Administrator identifies an inappropriate posted public comment that falls within the criteria set forth in section 7.6, They will proactively follow the steps below to attempt to remove the comment from public view as soon as possible provided the social media platform allows removal of comments.

7.7.3 Before removing a public comment or post, the Rockdale County Social Media Administrator must immediately capture screenshots of the inappropriate post or comment. The Rockdale County Social Media Administrator will promptly prepare a written description identifying the specific basis for the posting's removal. *NOTE:* Each Rockdale County Department Social Site Administrator is required to send ALL such information directly to Rockdale County's Public Relations Director for immediate storage/deposit into the Rockdale County Media files.

7.7.4 The Rockdale County Attorney's Office may be consulted with questions concerning the removal of comments and the applicability of the criteria in section 7.6 to a particular comment. Departments should submit questions for the Rockdale County Attorney's Office to the Public Relations Department and await a response.

7.8 Block of Banning a User

7.8.1 If a Rockdale County Social Media Administrator determines that a public user has violated these terms and conditions on three (3) or more occasions within a twelve-month rolling period, the Rockdale County Social Media Administrator may request Public Relations to consider a block or ban of a user.

7.8.2 To request a ban, the Social Media Administrator shall email the Director and Deputy Director of Public Relations with the subject line "Social Media Ban Request" and supply the user account name and a list of violations along with the dates. All violations should have been documented and screenshots should be saved. No bans or blocks may be enacted without approval.

7.8.3 Upon receipt of a ban request the Rockdale County Public Relations Department Leadership will consult with the Executive Leadership team and County Attorney to determine if a ban will be enacted.

7.8.4 If County Leadership determines a block or ban a public user is warranted, the Rockdale County Social Administrator will be notified by Public Relations and will (a) reasonably attempt to notify the public user; (b) describe the violation(s); and (c) explain the appeal process.

7.9 Appeals

7.9.1 If a Rockdale County Social Media Administrator inappropriately hides or deletes a public user's comment pursuant to these terms and conditions, the public user has the right to appeal that decision by sending an email or letter to Rockdale@mqablaw.com within five (5) business days.

7.9.2 Upon receipt of an appeal, Rockdale County's Attorney will determine whether the comment at issue contained content protected by law. If the appeal is successful, the comment may (if possible) be restored for public view, or the public user may be permitted to repost the comment. If the post/public comment is determined as not being protected by law, the public user will be notified that the appeal was denied.

7.9.3 Appealing a Blocking or Banning. If County Leadership determines a block or ban of a public user is warranted, the Rockdale County Social Administrator will be notified by Public Relations and will (a) reasonably attempt to notify the public user; (b) describe the violation(s); and (c) explain the appeal process.

The public user has the right to appeal that decision by sending an email or letter to [Rockdale County legal contact] within five (5) business days.

If the appeal is successful and the public user has not violated this policy three (3) times within a rolling 12-month period, the Rockdale County Social Site Administrator will unblock or unban the public user from the social media account. If the appeal is not successful, the decision will stand.

8.0 Posting Replies to Public Comments

7.9.1 A Rockdale County Social Media Administrator may, in the exercise of their discretion, post replies to public comments.

7.9.2 Such replies will be composed and presented in the same professional manner that a Rockdale County employee would use when replying to an email or phone inquiry from a member of the public. Business decorum must be always maintained, and the information provided will be factual in nature, and neither argumentative nor opinionated.

7.9.3 When posting replies to public comments, the Rockdale County Social Media Administrators will coordinate with other Rockdale County Departments when necessary to communicate the best information.

8.1 APPLICABLE LAWS AND POLICIES

8.1 All Rockdale County Social Media sites shall adhere to applicable federal and state laws and regulations and County ordinances, policies, and standards, including, but not limited to, legal requirements governing use of copyrighted materials, retention of records, and compliance with the Georgia Open Records Act, O.C.G.A. § 50-18-70, et seq., federal and state privacy laws.

8.2 OPEN RECORDS ACT NOTIFICATION

Every comment or posting posted to a Rockdale County Social Media Site is a public record and may be disseminated, reproduced, or copied by Rockdale County or any other person without any further action by the poster or without notice by Rockdale County. The material may also be forwarded to third parties. By posting on a Rockdale County Social Media Site, you agree that you have no expectation of privacy in any submissions made to the site.

Approved this 24 Day of September, 2024

Rockdale County, Georgia
Board of Commissioners

By: [Signature]
Oz Nesbitt, Sr., Chairman

By: [Signature]
Sherri L. Washington, Commissioner Post I

By: [Signature]
Doreen Williams, Commissioner Post II

Attest:

By: [Signature]
Jennifer Rutledge, County Clerk

Approved as to form

By: [Signature]
M. Qader A. Baig, County Attorney