

	ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURES		
	SUBJECT: External Communications Policy		
	EFFECTIVE DATE:	SUPERSEDES:	APPROVED BY:
January 19, 2016	All previously issued external communications policies	Board of Commissioners	

PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that Currituck County communication is coordinated, managed and responsive to the information needs of citizens. This policy establishes practices, protocols and procedures for Currituck County staff communication with media outlets, and for the use of social media sites as a means of conveying information to citizens.

A. For the purpose of this policy the term “**media**” refers to all individuals and organizations who maintain print, broadcast, or digital communication outlets for public consumption. This definition includes:

- Newspapers
- Magazines
- County Websites
- Television
- Public, Education and Government Access Channels (PEG)
- Radio
- Blogs
- Digital news sites
- Other media outlets

B. The term “**social media**” refers to an interactive form of media that is primarily web-based. The term most often refers to activities that integrate technology, telecommunications and social interaction, and the construction of words, pictures, videos and audio that allows users to interact with and publish to each other. This definition includes:

- Facebook
- Blogs
- Google+
- RSS
- YouTube
- Twitter
- LinkedIn
- Flickr
- Instagram
- Other social media outlets

GENERAL

External communication shall occur in accordance with the provisions of this policy and other relevant county policies, rules, regulations and ordinances. This policy may be revised from time to time. The Revision History is found on the last page of this policy.

PROCEDURES

A. Communicating with Media Outlets

1. The definition of Routine Media Request is one that seeks basic information.

Examples include:

- seeking general information about public events offered by libraries, parks, Senior Centers, etc.;
- seeking general information about programs or services offered;
- or other requests seeking information that is readily available and non-controversial.

Department heads or their designee may respond directly to routine media requests. The Public Information Officer (PIO) is available to assist staff with responses to routine requests.

2. A Non-routine Media Request may be of a sensitive or controversial nature and include responses that require the interpretation of policy, employee records, and public record requests for detailed records, legal action or emergency situations. Non-routine media requests must be forwarded to the Public Information Officer (PIO) prior to response.
3. In an emergency situation, the procedure for handling the media is highlighted in the Currituck Emergency Operations Plan. During a major emergency (i.e. severe weather, wildfire, etc.), public information will be released by the Public Information Officer (PIO), Emergency Management Director, County Manager or County Manager's designee. If the emergency is related to law enforcement, the Currituck County Sheriff is the lead spokesperson for the county. Incident commanders at the scene of an emergency, (ex: fire chief) are authorized to speak to media as needed.
4. For countywide inquiries, the spokesperson will most often be the Public Information Officer (PIO) or Currituck County Manager. For department-related (routine) issues, the spokesperson will most often be the respective Department Head or Department Head designee. With the exception of the Sheriff's Office, the Public Information Officer (PIO) or County Manager will be the spokesperson for all sensitive or controversial issues relating to Currituck County and its respective departments. Personnel related matters must be directed to the County Manager or Human Resources Director.

Unless otherwise authorized, the County's spokespersons are:

- Public Information Officer (PIO), County Manager or County Manager's designee
- Sheriff, Emergency Management Coordinator, Emergency Medical Services Director
- Elected officials
- Department Heads (routine issues only)

- Exceptions regarding departmental spokespersons may be made at the discretion of the Department Head.
5. County-initiated media contact may be through news releases, media advisories, news briefings, news conferences, personal contacts with reporters, etc. Department Heads or the Public Information Officer (PIO) will be responsible for scheduling media events and/or submission of media releases/advisories for non-crisis matters. During a crisis event, employees must adhere to the Currituck Emergency Operations Plan.

B. County Social Media

The County's social media applications are equivalent to the County's official website and must be treated with the same respect.

1. The County Manager or County Manager's designee will approve all social media projects and plans. The Department Head must submit an External Communication Account Authorization Request (See Appendix) form that outlines the department's mission and goals, target audience, responsibility, technical capabilities resources to maintain the site and potential benefits. Only authorized departments are permitted to conduct official county business on County-approved social media platforms and/or tools.
2. Departments and/or county staff individuals shall not establish independent social media accounts for county business. All social media sites will be administered and reviewed by the County WEB/AV Specialist to ensure that all county social media sites follow this policy.
3. Department Heads or Department Head designee will be responsible for determining who is authorized to use the social media sites on behalf of their department. This person will contact the County WEB/AV Specialist in order to have access to the County social media management tools.
4. County social media platforms will be created and maintained in accordance with this policy and with identifiable characteristics of an official Currituck County site, including the County logo.
5. Once a social media site has been approved and established all account changes or termination of that account must be submitted to the WEB/AV Specialist on an External Communication Termination/Change of Account Request form. (See Appendix).
6. Each department is responsible for establishing and maintaining content posted on its social media sites. The Public Information Officer (PIO) and Web/AV Specialist must have access to the social media site. Each social media platform must include the department contact information and a link to the County provided website disclaimer stating that opinions expressed by visitors to the page do not reflect the opinion of Currituck County Government.
7. The County reserves the right to at any time and without prior notice deny access to any department's social media site(s) for any individual who violates this policy.
8. Pages must include a disclaimer indicating that posted comments will be monitored and that the County reserves the right to restrict or remove, and archive with explanation, any comment that is:

- profane, obscene or pornographic language or content or links to such language or content;
 - a solicitation of commerce, including but not limited to advertising of any business or product for sale;
 - in support of, or in opposition to, any political campaigns or ballot measures;
 - an encouragement of illegal activity;
 - defamatory or a personal attack;
 - threatening to any person or organization;
 - a violation of any federal, state or local law including, but not limited to, laws and policies regarding copyright, records retention, Freedom of Information Act, First Amendment, Public Records Act privacy laws, and policies established by the County.
 - content that promotes, fosters, or perpetuates discrimination on the basis of race, color, creed, sex, age, national origin or ancestry, physical or mental disability, veteran status, parentage, marital status, medical condition, sexual identity, sexual orientation, as well as any other category protected by federal, state or local laws.
 - concerning topics or issues not within the jurisdictional purview of the County.
9. If comments are in the context to the posted topic, the comment will remain posted, whether it is favorable or unfavorable to the County and/or its respective departments.
 10. Communication via department-related social networking sites is a public record and posts by the site administrator and any feedback by other parties are subject to the Public Records Act.
 11. Confidential information must not be posted on any County social media platform. Any question regarding the confidentiality of information must be referred to the County Attorney.
 12. The County Manager or County Manager's designee has the authority to terminate any social media account(s) and/or page(s) without notice and disciplinary actions may be taken for commentary, content or images that are against County policy.
 13. Exceptions: The Sheriff's Office can use any social media tool at the discretion of the Currituck County Sheriff. All other county departments must submit an External Communication Account Authorization Request (See Appendix) form prior to developing a social media platform.

C. County Websites

County websites exist to increase awareness and accessibility to online resources pertaining to local government services and programs.

1. The County's authorized website is www.co.currituck.nc.us also known as www.CurrituckGovernment.com. All County departments must utilize the website to communicate with residents and targeted groups, including community leaders and organizations, local and potential businesses, current and potential residents, visitors and County employees.

The County website must showcase County accomplishments, educate the community about how government works and encourage public participation in local government and provide demographic and commercial information that supports business expansion and recruitment.

2. The County's website is coordinated by the Currituck County Web/AV Specialist. Requests for web design work for completely new web sections and related content for posting on the County's website must be routed through the county Web/AV Specialist.
3. Each department is responsible for assigning an employee to be the department's web administrator and monitor the department's respective web sections to ensure accurate and timely information.
4. Web content must fall within the parameters of the County Website Usage Guidelines (See Appendix) that have been established for the County website. Content must also meet all state and federal laws, including copyright laws.
5. Departments, vendors, contractors or any party representing the County may not develop a separate website and/or new web address (URLs) on behalf of the County without a preauthorized External Communication Account Authorization Request (See Appendix) form.
6. Once a separate website has been authorized and established all account changes or termination of that account must be submitted to the WEB/AV Specialist on an External Communication Termination/Change of Account Request (See Appendix) form.
7. Links to other websites are limited to government or public agencies, as well as local organizations and non-profit websites that have a relationship with county content. Links must be periodically checked to make sure they are still viable links.

D. Public, Education and Government Access Channels (PEG)

PEG channels provide diverse programming which informs, educates, and entertains County residents is under the responsibility of the County's Public Information Officer (PIO), WEB/Video Specialist, County Manager or County Manager's designee. The Currituck County PEG channels are: Mediacom, Channel 18 on the Mainland; Charter, Channel 198 on the Outer Banks; and Cox, Channel 46 on Knotts Island. These are local, non-profit television production channels operated by the County.

1. The PEG channels feature public service announcements produced by the County or school system and items produced by other entities with information for delivery to County citizens.
2. The County reserves the right to refuse to transmit a public access program, or a portion of the program, over the PEG channels whether produced locally or provided from another source which it believes does not meet the following criteria:
 - non-commercial material;
 - adheres to federal copyright laws. Content containing copyrighted materials will not be broadcast without proper copyright authorization. Any County or non-County personnel who produce or are responsible for programming the PEG channel will be responsible for obtaining all necessary copyright clearance with respect to production or programming and shall hold the County harmless in any instance of copyright infringement. However, when deemed appropriate by the County Manager or County Manager's designee, credit may be cited on the PEG channel when special assistance has been provided by a commercial or charitable enterprise;
 - not mention monetary donations including solicitations on behalf of candidates for public office;

- not be a commercial activity for advertising, promotion of a particular commercial interest, or be produced as a profit-making venture itself;
 - not be a promotion for lottery materials or similar enterprises;
 - not be libelous, slanderous, or illegal material;
 - not be of an obscene or sexually explicit material and/or promoting unlawful conduct;
 - not include material which incites violent or harmful acts on other persons;
 - meets the mission of the PEG channel, or appropriate for current programming.
3. Federal Communications Commission (FCC) and other federal and state regulations regarding copyright, obscenity, and privacy must be followed. In addition to the FCC regulations the County may enact ordinances governing use and operation of the channels.
 4. Submitted video programs must meet technical standards outlined in this document and are required to meet the following criteria:
 - Have a Government and Educational Access Channels Video Programming Request (See Appendix) form;
 - Have a Media Release Request (See Appendix) form if required;
 - Approved programs will be scheduled by the Public Information Officer (PIO) or WEB/Video Specialist.

E. Digital Signage

The County's digital sign presence promotes County activities, events, educational opportunities and emergency bulletins by providing timely information to targeted audiences. Content must comply with local, state and federal laws, as well as all other County policies. Oversight and policies governing the use of the digital sign resources is under the responsibility of the county's Public Information Officer (PIO), WEB/Video Specialist, County Manager or County Manager's designee.

The County reserves the right to refuse to post information, or a portion of any information whether produced locally or provided from another source which it believes does not meet the following criteria:

- adhered to federal copyright laws. Content containing copyrighted materials shall not be broadcast without proper copyright authorization. Any County and/or non-County personnel responsible for content shall be responsible for obtaining all necessary copyright clearance and shall hold the County harmless in any instance of copyright infringement;
- not mention monetary donations including solicitations on behalf of candidates for public office;
- not be a commercial activity for advertising, promotion of a particular commercial interest, or be for profit-making;
- not be a promotion for lottery materials, personal messages or similar enterprises;
- not be libelous, slanderous, or illegal material;
- not be of an obscene or sexually explicit material and/or promoting unlawful conduct;
- not include material which incites violent or harmful acts on other persons.
- be used only for its intended purpose and/or audience;
- board content must fall within the parameters established in the County Digital Sign Guidelines;
- content is compatible with County's policies.

F. Records Management and Preservation

1. Communication through County resources is a public record under NCGS, Chapter 132. This applies to all forms of external communication addressed in this policy.
2. County-related communication by employees through an employee's private resources is also considered a public record.

G. Personal Use of Media

1. Broadcast/Print Media

- a. Letters to publication editors may not be prepared on County time, printed on County letterhead, mailed at County expense or emailed from a County email address. Telephone contact with publications must not be made on County time using County telephones and use of County facilities, computers or supplies is prohibited.
- b. Responses or letters to the media shall not include the employee's official title or imply that comments are made on behalf of the County.

2. Social Media

- a. Employees who use social media for personal purposes must adhere to personal conduct and ethics guidelines within the Currituck County Personnel Policy.
- b. Employees' personal social networking sites must remain personal in nature and be used to share personal opinions or non-work related information. This helps ensure a distinction between personal and County views.
- c. Employees will not use their County email account in conjunction with a personal social networking site and employees will not refer or link back to their own personal site from the professional site.
- d. Employees who use social media for personal purposes must:
 - always use a disclaimer anywhere there may be uncertainty about the capacity in which they are acting.
 - respect copyright and fair use laws;
 - recognize that disciplinary action may be taken for publishing inappropriate comments that reflect badly on the employer;
 - be of legal liability for anything written or posted online. Disciplinary action may be taken for commentary, content, or images that are defamatory, pornographic, harassing, libelous, or that can create a hostile work environment;
 - not use the County seal and county logo for personal use;
 - never display pictures of the employee in uniform or at work unless specifically authorized to do so by the employee's Department Head;

H. Public Records Requests

Public records requests must be forwarded to the Clerk to the Board of Commissioners, who will coordinate the collection of appropriate information to satisfy the request.

I. Personnel Related Issues

Media requests regarding a personnel issue must be forwarded to the Human Resources Director, County Attorney, or County Manager.

J. Branding

The accepted visual brand images for the County are the County Seal and Geese Logo. County employees will use these images in a consistent manner in all forms of external communication.

The County holds a copyright for the seal and logo, and neither is to be altered in any manner. County staff shall not provide a copy of either the seal or logo to an outside party without the written permission of the County Manager or County Manager's designee.

1. The County Seal is formal in nature and denotes an official County document.



- The seal is approved for County letterhead, vehicle decals and County flags.
 - There are two approved versions: one in color, and one in black-and-white, and are available on the County's shared folders.
 - Employees should use the black-and-white version when intending to print in black-and-white for a cleaner look.
2. The Geese Logo is generally considered to be less formal than the seal and is accepted for materials or communications from County departments other than letterhead or official documents. Examples include newsletters, social media, and public displays.



- There are two approved versions: one in color, and one in black-and-white, and are available on the county's shared folders.
- A Department name may be centered directly under the logo. See example below:



Department of
Parks & Recreation



Parks & Recreation

3. Under certain circumstances other logos and/or seals may be accepted.
 - a. The Sheriff's Office has a department seal which is used in the discretion of the Currituck County Sheriff.
 - b. Any additional logo created for marketing purposes, uniforms, or public display by any department must be approved by the County Manager or County Manager's designee. To obtain approval, the Department Head must submit a completed External Communication Account Authorization Request (See Appendix) form.
 - c. Once an individual department logo has been approved and established all changes or termination of that logo will be submitted to the County Manager or County Manager's designee on an External Communication Termination/Change of Account Request (See Appendix) form.
4. Public documents, reports, email, social media, and other county-produced materials must be printed in a professional, non-cursive, easy-to-read font. Department heads may approve fonts selected for their staff. Any font deemed inappropriate or unprofessional by the County Manager, or County Manager's designee, shall be replaced.

Acceptable fonts are (samples are shown in font size 11):

- Arial
 - Calibri
 - Candara
 - Courier
 - Franklin Gothic Book
 - Garamond
 - Helvetica
 - Microsoft Sans Serif
 - Tahoma
 - Times New Roman
 - Verdana
5. All County employees will use a standard format for letterhead (see Letterhead Example in Appendix). Employees may use a MS Word .dot template to make new letter creation easier the employee's department. The Information Technology department can assist with template creation.
 6. All County employees will follow a standard format when using a county email account. County email shall be formatted as follows:

- The background of the email page will be plain white, and all text will be black in color.
- The email signature shall contain only the following information:

Name Job title County of Currituck Department Name (optional) Telephone # Fax Number# Email address County website link County social media sites	Example: John Doe Planner 1 County of Currituck Planning & Community Development Phone: 252-232-1111 Fax: 252-232-2222 Email: john.doe@currituckcountync.gov Website: www.currituckgovernment.com Link to facebook, twitter, etc. here
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- Email signatures shall not include the County Seal or Geese Logo.
- Email signatures shall not include any personalized images, phrases, slogans or text.
- A Public Records Disclaimer statement will be automatically placed on each outgoing email. This feature will be set up by the Information Technology Department.

K. Security

Employees must be mindful to prevent fraud or unauthorized access to social media sites or the County network.

Employees must exercise caution when interacting with external entities, those both known and unknown to the employee. If at all in doubt of the legitimacy of any information received, the employee must avoid linking to external sites.

In order to prevent potential harm, employees must minimize the amount of information an attacker is likely to gain from a successful attack. For example, individual user IDs and passwords will not be duplicated across multiple sites. In this way, if one site is compromised, the attacker cannot gain access to other sites for which the user is authorized.

For added security, the following guidelines must be followed:

- Use strong passwords which cannot be easily compromised;
- Periodically change passwords to accounts;
- Refrain from adding, installing, attaching or linking to any additional external services or applications that may potentially grant or enable access to the content, information or posts within the social media account;
- Use caution when accessing links received from external entities;
- Exercise caution when utilizing shortened links (links that have been shortened for ease of relaying the original link), as these may lead to a malicious site;
- Be watchful for spoofed emails and/or website (seemingly official-looking communications that lead the user to a malicious website or attempt to solicit the

user's personal or financial information). Consult the Information Technology Director regarding any security-related matter.

L. Timely Response

1. County employees must respond with accurate information to all questions from the public and media by the end of the next business day. This includes, but is not limited to, questions received via the following methods:
 - Telephone
 - Email
 - Social Media
2. An exception to this rule may be an official Public Records Request, which is addressed in Section H of this policy.

M. Policy Violations

Any employee becoming aware of, or having knowledge of, a violation of any provision of this policy must notify his or her supervisor immediately for follow-up action.

Violation of the standards of this External Communications Policy may result in disciplinary action, including dismissal, as determined by the County Manager in accordance with the Currituck County Personnel Policy.

