City of Edmonton

SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDELINES

Edmonton

Introduction

The City of Edmonton Social Media Guidelines provide an overview of approved practices for creating, posting and working with social media.

The guidelines are designed to help you better understand the opportunities, manage the risks and ensure that as an employee or representative of the City you understand the responsibilities and boundaries associated with using social media in your work.

Here are definitions of the most commonly-used terms and abbreviations in the document:

SOCIAL MEDIA - Internet-based websites and applications that enable the creation and sharing of content or participation in social networking.

CONTENT - Any information (messages, images, videos) that is communicated on a social media channel.

MAIN CITY SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNTS - City of Edmonton's social media accounts that are managed and maintained by the Media Relations Unit in the Communications and Engagement department. This does not include City social media accounts that focus on specific operational areas and services.

SOCIAL MEDIA ADMINISTRATOR - The individual who is in charge of a specific social media account. This person has the ability to activate a social media account including posting, commenting and moderating comments based on the City of Edmonton's Social Media Terms of Engagement.

COE / THE CITY / CITY - means The City of Edmonton

MRU - means the Media Relations Unit within the Communications and Engagement Department.

The latest version of the Social Media Guidelines is available at edmonton.ca/socialmedia. Please contact the Media Relations Unit at caerbmediarelationsunit@edmonton.ca if you have suggestions or questions.

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Why the City uses Social Media

The City of Edmonton has used social media to provide accessible, timely information to the public since 2009. Social media contributes to the overall communications goals of the City which include being transparent and accessible; having a progressive image; keeping residents, community organizations and stakeholders informed and engaged using the channels of their choice; and reaching local, national and international audiences. The unique benefits of social media include:

Increase citizens' access to government

Social media provides a direct connection between the public and the City and fosters civic engagement. The City uses social media to provide real-time information to citizens on issues, programs and services, and news and events that affect them. The City's presence on social media, using various platforms and accounts, provides people with different options to connect with the City.

Build relationships with citizens, partners and stakeholders

The City of Edmonton has built and fostered relationships with people and organizations in the community through its social channels. The City supports and shares information from partner organizations and stakeholders to reinforce current relationships and build stronger ties.

Provide better customer service

As social media use continues to increase, it provides an increasingly popular option for people to ask the City questions and share feedback. While it is not a replacement for our 311 channel and app, social media can be used to respond to inquiries from the public in a timely manner, particularly straightforward questions.

Increase the level of trust in City Government

The public can sometimes question or even distrust the government. Edmonton has committed to being as transparent and open as possible in providing public access to information (see Open City Policy - C581). Social media is an important tool in building high levels of trust through continual, timely and accurate information sharing and engagement.

Enhance the reputation and image of the City

Social media is an excellent way to showcase different offerings that enhance Edmonton and build a better city for tomorrow. The City's social media accounts are entry points for Edmontonians and people worldwide to experience and understand Edmonton. It is important that social media is engaging as it is often the first impression many in the community and the world are exposed to.

Create a dialogue with the public

Social media offers the opportunity to engage in a real-time, back and forth conversation with the public. This enables stronger two-way communication that displays openness and transparency and can invite others into the conversation.

Manage messages by creating content that stands alongside mass media

The City can use social media to clarify information in news stories by traditional media that are inaccurate or can benefit from supplemental information. Social media can promote stories in mass media, but this is usually not done to avoid any perception of bias. Social media is an additional tool to promote media releases and break stories to the media.

Provide additional communication channels in times of emergency

In the event of an emergency, social media allows the City to reach citizens quickly and effectively. The City can provide updates to help keep citizens safe, secure and informed.

Provide greater scope to adjust communications quickly when necessary

Social media supports the City's efforts to manage issues as they arise. Staff using social media can monitor trends and conversations on social media, allowing the City to prepare messages/responses and be on top of issues before they escalate. Mass media and the public often look to the City's social media channels for the latest news and information.

Reach specific audiences on specific issues

The City's social media posts include messages from all City departments in an effort to represent all our operational areas and services. The public follows the main City accounts to receive valuable information about City services, programs and events. The City has additional social media accounts to connect with targeted groups of people on specific issues such as Parks, Recreation Centres, Transit and Urban Planning.

Roles and Responsibilities

The City of Edmonton's Media Relations Unit (MRU) is responsible for the coordination and management of the City's main social media accounts. MRU works with Communications and Engagement staff to ensure social media contributes successfully to the achievement of the City's objectives ([ConnectEdmonton](#)) and goals ([The City Plan](#)). For a description of the groups and individuals involved with social media and a short explanation of their responsibilities, please see [Appendix I](#).

City of Edmonton Social Media Accounts

The City has many social media accounts that are listed on the City of Edmonton website at edmonton.ca/socialmedia.

The main City of Edmonton accounts, managed by the Media Relations Unit, include:
- Twitter (@CityofEdmonton)
- Facebook (facebook.com/cityofedmonton)
- Instagram (instagram.com/cityofedmonton)
- YouTube (youtube.com/user/CityEdmonton)
- Transforming Edmonton Blog (https://transforming.edmonton.ca)

The City of Edmonton's main social media accounts are a direct communication channel to the public and host content provided by various City departments. These accounts have thousands of followers and because of this, publishing to these accounts is one of the easiest and quickest ways to share a message to the public.

Content for these accounts is typically created by Communications and Engagement staff and provided to MRU for review, scheduling and posting.

Content posted on the City of Edmonton's main social media accounts includes media releases, information and updates on City programs, services and events, education campaigns, public engagement opportunities, traffic alerts and public safety information. These accounts are also used to monitor public sentiment on these topics, and answer inquiries related to the City from the public.

Types of messaging the City provides on its corporate social media channels:
- City announcements that do not warrant a media release
- Public safety messaging
- City of Edmonton-run contests
- Support of initiatives run by external organizations
- Responding to questions the public have about City services/operations/events
- An event or activity the public is invited to participate in or interested in
- Create, post and invite people to events
- A project, program or initiative that portrays the City of Edmonton (and the city as a whole) as an innovative and desirable place to live, as supporting the local economy or aligning with the City Plan

Twitter
Social media content featured on the City's Twitter account includes tweets up to 280 characters that may include links, photos, videos or other users' tweets. The City of Edmonton Twitter account is also occasionally used as a channel for paid content (in support of advertising campaigns).

Twitter users can choose to follow the CIty's Twitter account. Twitter users can tweet (send a message), retweet (repost someone else's tweet), quote-tweet (repost someone else's tweet with your own message), reply to someone else's tweet or direct message (send a private message).

MRU monitors user interactions with City of Edmonton tweets, as well as account mentions, local interests and topics.

To learn more about Twitter, visit https://help.twitter.com.

Facebook
Social media content featured on the City of Edmonton - Local Government Facebook page includes link posts, photos, videos and event posts. Facebook allows users to broadcast live. Similar to Twitter, the City of Edmonton - Local Government Facebook page is also used on occasion for paid content (advertising).

Facebook users can choose to like/follow the City's Facebook page. Facebook users can engage with our content in a variety of ways including, reacting using an emoji, posting a comment and sharing our content.

MRU monitors user interactions with City of Edmonton Facebook posts as well as account mentions.

To learn more about Facebook, visit http://www.facebook.com/help.

Instagram
Social media content featured on the City's Instagram account includes images and videos with descriptions in the Instagram Feed (photo grid), and images, videos and storyboards in the Instagram Stories (story slides that expire after 24 hours). Instagram has video editing capabilities to create short videos called Instagram Reels. Instagram allows users to broadcast live. The City of Edmonton Instagram account is sometimes also used as a channel for paid content (advertising campaigns).

MRU monitors user interactions with City of Edmonton Instagram posts.

To learn more about Instagram, visit https://help.instagram.com.

YouTube
The City of Edmonton YouTube channel hosts videos from various City departments for both internal use and for the public. The City of Edmonton also uses YouTube to broadcast live streams such as media availabilities, panel discussions and events.

YouTube users can choose to subscribe to the City's YouTube channel and select how often to be notified when the City uploads new public-facing videos or starts a public live stream. They may also rate videos with a thumbs up or thumbs down feature and leave a comment below the video.

MRU moderates comments posted on City of Edmonton videos.

To learn more about YouTube, visit https://support.google.com/youtube.

Transforming Edmonton
The Transforming Edmonton blog tells the story of how the City of Edmonton anticipates and responds to its environment in the service of the million people who live here now, helping to build the kind of city that will attract another million people.

City employees are invited to share information on programs that may not be in the news spotlight or stories that need more context. City employees can use text, images and video to go behind the scenes on complex topics to help Edmontonians learn what it takes to deliver municipal services.

Blog posts are approved by Communications staff at the City and must meet editorial standards for quality writing including readability, plain language and more; however content does not have to be written by Communications staff. Departmental clients are encouraged to use Transforming Edmonton as a platform to tell a story about their area, their staff or their campaigns, especially if the perspectives of Edmontonians are included. If a City employee is interested in writing a blog post they may connect with their Communications Advisor for assistance.

To learn more about the Transforming Edmonton blog, visit
https://transforming.edmonton.ca/about-transforming-edmonton/.

Conduct on Social Media

Using social media comes with a certain amount of risk. To manage the risk effectively, all City employees need to know, understand and put into practice the guidelines for acceptable use of social media.

Social Media on City Accounts

Using social media for the City means you are acting as a spokesperson and must represent the City in a positive way. This means that we will adhere to the Code of Conduct when communicating.

When using social media in an official capacity, the same rules apply as when speaking with the media or when representing the City at a business conference or similar event. Employees acting as official City representatives or spokespeople must not express personal opinions when posting or commenting from a City of Edmonton Social Media account.

If you have concerns about conflict of interest situations, review the City of Edmonton Code of Conduct or talk to your manager.

It is recommended that only City of Edmonton-owned devices be used to post and monitor social media content on the City's social media accounts.

Maintaining City Social Media Accounts

The City of Edmonton main social media accounts and all City accounts managed by City staff are owned by the City of Edmonton. The Media Relations Unit must have full Administrator access to all City-owned social media accounts.

City social media accounts should be updated with content often, either daily, weekly or biweekly to be kept current and relevant. This includes ensuring any banner images, account bio and about sections are kept up-to-date.

If a City social account is inactive for a long period of time, the purpose of the account should be revisited. MRU and the Director of Reputation may take authority over inactive accounts and decide if they should be archived and/or deleted.

Dealing with problem users

Occasionally an individual or organization engages with the City in a disrespectful manner. The Social Media Terms of Engagement (Appendix II) should be reviewed to determine if the comment warrants a response. The Social Media Terms of Engagement explain the types of comments the City will moderate and respond to.

The City's preference is to engage in productive dialogue with those we serve. We do not take the decision to ban or block users on social media lightly, but if an individual violates

the City's Terms of Engagement repeatedly then there is recourse for either limiting or denying future access to post on City social media channels.

Social media and contracted organizations

Individuals or groups contracted to create content for City social media accounts (such as an advertising agency) must be authorized by the Media Relations Unit and follow these Social Media Guidelines.

Personal Social Media

Individuals are encouraged to use social media to be informed about the City and issues that may impact our programs and services. Your personal social media accounts provide you with a right to free speech as a private citizen.

As stated in the Employee Code of Conduct, if it is reasonable that you could be identified as a City employee, then your comments must accurately reflect the decisions of Council and Administration and must not weigh in on the opinions or political positions of elected officials. Caution is also advised during an election period. Your comments and actions on your personal social media accounts should remain neutral and not show preference or opposition to any candidate.

Posts to your personal accounts must not undermine City Council or Administration's objectives, the City's reputation or relationships with its stakeholders. Comments should not discriminate, harass or demonstrate disrespect toward any person or entity. Engagement with members of the public, in any forum, that encourages respectful dialogue on relevant municipal issues is not a breach of the code of conduct provided it is factual, appropriate, and does not conflict with Council direction and the City's other obligations, such as protecting privacy and maintaining confidentiality and a respectful workplace. Likewise, employees must uphold anti-discrimination and anti-harassment principles as set out in the City's [Respectful Workplace Policy and Procedures (A1127)](#), and as outlined in the Alberta Human Rights Act. Inappropriate content posted on personal social media may impact your employment with the City whether or not it was posted from a City device or during work hours.

Consequences for abuse of social media

In the event a City employee uses City social media in a manner that violates the City's Code of Conduct or these Social Media Guidelines, the user may lose access to that social media account and may face disciplinary action up to and including termination.

Creating Social Media Content

Content is any information that is posted on social media including words, images, videos, links, and anything else displayed on a social media account. Content is what drives social media. The City values meaningful, informative, accurate and authentic content to attract and retain its social media audience, build awareness of and affinity to the City and its programs and services, promote engagement and facilitate conversation.

This section outlines the best practices for creating social media content.

Social Media should be meaningful

Content should serve a purpose for the City of Edmonton and its social media audience. What outcomes do you want to achieve from sharing your content? Meaningful content will keep social media audiences engaged, which can lead to increased awareness and reach, more engagement, and conversions, such as website visits, survey completions, program registration, etc.

Social Media should be informative

The City is a public service and strives to enable a better life for all Ed montonians. Social media content should inform and educate about City programs, initiatives and policies.

Social Media should be accurate, timely and reliable

In addition to being informative, social media content should be accurate. It should provide information in a clear, concise and complete manner, as well as being timely and reliable. The City should be seen as the source of truth.

Social Media should be inclusive and accessible

Social Media content should be accessible to all and follow online accessibility best practices. This includes adding alternative text to images and closed captioning to videos.

Staff can visit OneCity to access the *City's Inclusive Language Guide* and the *City's Social Media Accessibility Requirements* document for more details.

Creating content

Each social media channel provides a different way to share content. A promotion could be a tweet, a Facebook event, a photo on Instagram, or a YouTube video. Create content for the social media channels that will best reach your audience and achieve your objectives.

Content quality is more important than quantity. Great content should reach and engage your audience, and achieve your objectives from the first post. Subsequent posts should reach your audience at different times of the day, be reworded, and serve as an important

reminder of the key message. To get a better idea of how many posts a specific campaign needs, please see the [Social Media Request Template (Appendix III)](#).

Submitting content for publishing

Please use the [Social Media Request Template](#) to submit social media content for review and scheduling on the City of Edmonton's main social media channels. Email the completed social media request to MRU at caerbmediarelationsunit@edmonton.ca.

If you do not work in Communications and Engagement, send your posts to your Communications Advisor for review and they will forward them to MRU. Requests to post social media content on the City's social media channels should be sent at least two business days before the date they are to be posted.

Using graphics and images

Graphics and images posted on City Social accounts need to follow the [City of Edmonton Corporate Brand Guidelines](#) (see *Best Practices for Social Media Graphics on Page 39*) and [Visual Identity Standards](#).

When recognizable people appear in photography and videography to be used in social media posts, the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* requires their written consent. Please ensure a [Model Release Contract](#) is completed when conducting a shoot.

Requesting to sharing content

The focus of the City's social media is on City of Edmonton news, events and activities. Sometimes, we will share information from other organizations, partners and stakeholders. We will share, like, or favourite the social media posts of other organizations, as long as the City is involved and there is space to do so.

Permission is required to share photos owned by people or organizations outside of the City of Edmonton.

Engagement

Social media exists for content sharing, engagement and conversations.
Here are key guidelines to keep in mind when engaging with your followers:

Treat everyone with respect and equality

No matter the comment or quality of conversation, treat everyone with respect. It doesn't matter if you've seen a comment many times before, treat it the same as you would the first time. The public appreciates a response, even if we are unable to give them the exact answer they are looking for.

If a comment or question violates the City's Social Media Terms of Engagement, do not respond to it, instead, we may choose to ignore the comment, hide the comment, delete the comment or report the comment using the social channel's reporting tools. If you require guidance on this subject, please reach out to the Media Relations Unit, caerbmediarelationsunit@edmonton.ca.

Promote Two-way Conversations

If you provide opportunities for the public to respond to posts, expect to be involved in some social media conversations. You will gain a better perspective on how the public is responding to certain issues and can use that feedback to alter future campaigns or projects as necessary.

Provide Accurate Information

If you receive a question that you don't know how to answer, don't just guess and post a response. There are subject matter experts throughout the organization who are able to help. It's better to spend extra time researching the right answer instead of immediately posting something that is inaccurate.

Be Timely With Your Responses

There is an expectation from the public that an answer will be provided as quickly as possible on social media. It is important to constantly monitor your account or reply to comments flagged by MRU as quickly as possible, with correct information that can be presented in a polite, respectful way.

Tone and language

Tone should be consistent throughout all social media content published on our social media channels. Language should be clear, concise and consistent. Please refer to the City's Brand Guidelines (page 9) for more information on tone and language.

Everything You Post is Public

Everything put on social media is public and even direct messages could be seen by other people in the future. People may screenshot posts before they are deleted. Keep this in mind when creating content and answering questions. Do not divulge any confidential information on City social media.

Responding to Social Media Comments

The City strives to address concerns from the public. We respond to general inquiries in a timely manner during business hours using messaging provided by Communications staff or from edmonton.ca and 311 scripts. Inquiries that require additional details or personal information will be replied to, asking them to use our 311 services.

Responding to comments and queries on social media is not always necessary. The [Social Media Terms of Engagement](#) detail the types of comments and questions the City responds to.

If a comment or question is posted in response to a social media post you submitted, MRU will flag the comment and send it to you. Please provide a response following the engagement expectations listed above.

You should always have messages in place when creating social media. Great content usually leads to engagement, which means you will receive feedback or questions. Have an answer prepared and you can foster relationships and provide great customer service.

If you manage a City social media site, it is expected that you will respond to comments and questions according to the City's [Social Media Terms of Engagement](#).

Analysis and Reporting

MRU uses Facebook Insights, Twitter Analytics, Hootsuite Pro and Google Analytics to download data on how City of Edmonton social media content is performing on the main City of Edmonton social media channels.

This data is used in MRU monthly and annual media reports that provide analytics and insights on content posted on the main City social media accounts. The reports are shared widely with employees within the Communications and Engagement department.

MRU can provide reports on social media campaigns that run on the City's main social channels by request, if you are not able to obtain a specific report from your Communications advisor. Reports on paid social media campaigns (paid advertising on social media) need to be requested separately through the City's advertising agency of record. Please request these through your Communications advisor.

Analytics show how posts perform and what resonates with the public. If you manage an account for the City, MRU can provide training to better understand analytics and how they work.

Social media administrators should analyze their account performance to confirm if they are reaching their goals. MRU can provide advice or additional consultation if needed.

Running a Contest on Social Media

If you plan to run a contest using the City's social media channels, please consult with MRU first. There are limitations to both receiving contest entries and contacting winners on social media.

Things to consider:

- Who is your audience for the contest? Which social channels do they use? Who is eligible to enter?
- What do you want your audience to do to enter the contest?
- Who is monitoring how contest entries are received?
- How long do you want to run the contest?
- What are your contest prizes and the value of those prizes?

Please note, to run a contest on social media, a clear set of Contest Rules & Regulations must be approved by the City's legal team. It is a statutory requirement to give adequate and fair disclosure to potential contest entrants of the contest information. Once the contest rules are prepared, they should be forwarded to the Legal Services Branch with sufficient time for review prior to the planned start of the contest.

For a complete list of contest rules, please see [Appendix IV](#).

Social Media in an Emergency

One of the greatest assets of social media is being able to share immediate, real-time information with the public. Social media has shown to be an extremely valuable tool during emergency situations where messages need to be sent out to the public as quickly and controlled as possible.

In the event of an emergency and the Emergency Operations Centre is activated, at least one Public Information Officer will be assigned to the EOC. The team member will manage and monitor the main City of Edmonton social media accounts, providing updates on social media that have been approved by the Director at EOC, and coordinating with the Crisis Communications team.

If the emergency situation is escalated, the main City of Edmonton social media accounts will provide appropriate messaging, focusing exclusively on the emergency and the City's response (i.e. all other corporate messaging will be temporarily paused). The public will turn to the City during an emergency and we must be ready to respond as accurately and expediently as possible.

EOC may also be activated for planned events such as Canada Day fireworks. A PIO who is also a member of the Crisis Communications team will always be present to provide citizens with the latest information from emergency and City partners as it becomes available.

Social Media Training

Social media training is recommended for those who manage City of Edmonton social media accounts to ensure they understand how the City uses social media.

MRU can provide social media training for any City of Edmonton employee. Priority is given to employees who are actively involved in social media for the City.

MRU provides group training sessions and individual coaching, depending on the knowledge and needs of the social media user.

MRU provides training on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Hootsuite, YouTube and the Transforming Edmonton Blog. MRU can also provide training on the fundamentals of social media such as creating content, best practices and engagement tips.

For new account administrators, MRU provides training on creating an account and how to manage it effectively.

For more information on social media training please contact the Media Relations Unit at caerbmediarelationsunit@edmonton.ca.

Requesting a new City social media account

On very rare occasions, there may be a strong business case to have a dedicated social media presence for a specific City business area or program. Before a new account can be created, the business unit must confer with the Media Relations Unit and any applicable staff who will be assisting in running a new account and/or channel to confirm if a new social media account is the best solution. If a new account/channel is deemed appropriate, the business case and request will be submitted to the Branch Manager of Reputation and Brand for final approval.

When contemplating a new social media account, a number of factors should be considered. Building an audience on social media takes time and there is an expectation to provide consistent, valuable and interesting content. Managing a social media account takes time and dedication everyday.

Questions to Consider:

Are you familiar with Social Media?
You have to know how to run and maintain your chosen social media channel(s) before you start an account(s). The MRU recommends that social media administrators have experience creating social content and managing social media channels.

What is the purpose of this new account?
What are your intentions in starting a new social media account? If the account is for a one-time event it would be better promoted through other methods.

Does your audience use Social Media?
If and where your audience is online will help to determine if and which social media channels will be most valuable. Find the best channel for your audience.

Does the account align with the City's brand and City Plan?
It is important that what you are trying to achieve aligns with the City's vision, goals and brand. The City's Reputation and Brand team will ensure new social accounts align with the City's corporate brand. Contact brandteam@edmonton.ca for more information.

Do you have the resources to manage the account?
Most social media accounts will require daily to weekly dedicated time and effort to keep them updated, engaging and running smoothly. If you have someone or a group of people who can devote a day of their week to social media, preferably a bit every day, that is a great start.

Can you provide engaging content on a regular basis?
The ability to run a successful social media account ultimately depends on content. Putting out new posts or updates every day is great, but they must have a purpose and connect with your audience. In order to have a successful social media account your content must be consistent and engaging.

If you can answer all of these questions and feel like you still need a dedicated social media account, please reach out to MRU to discuss the creation of a new social media account and to obtain the necessary approvals.