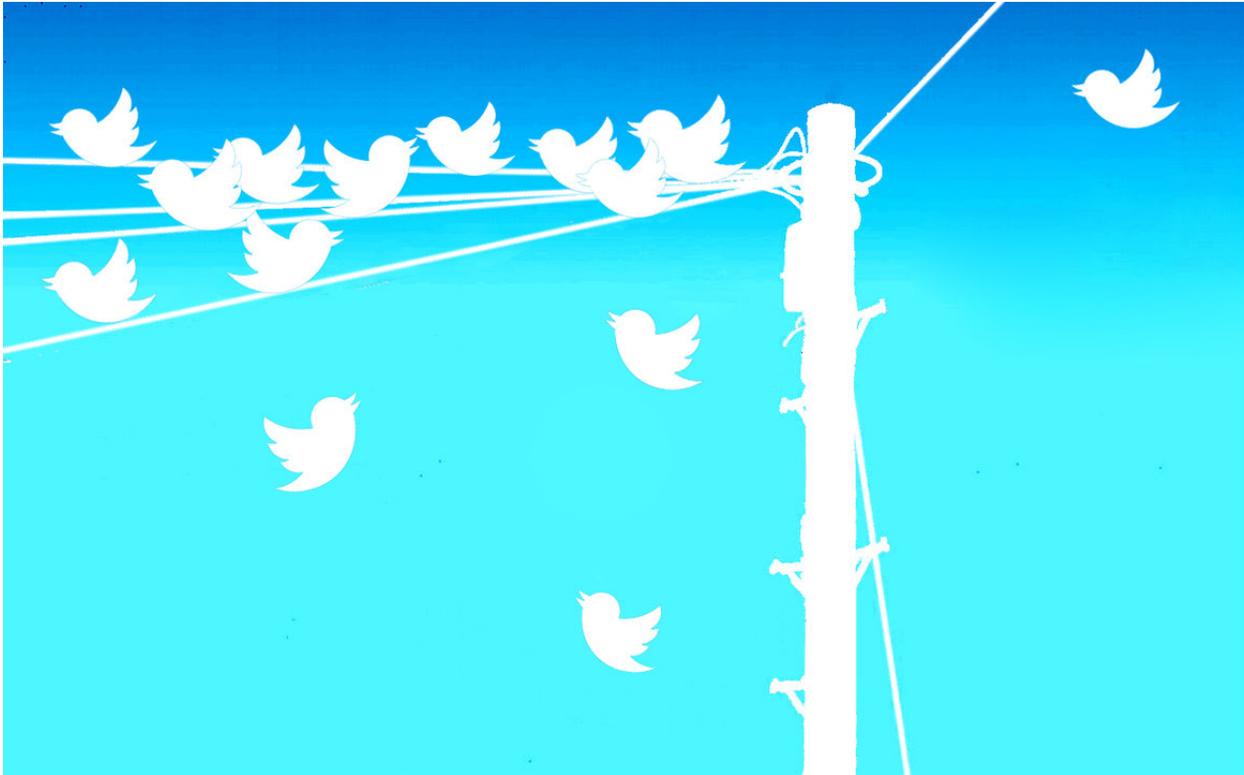# 4 Common Mistakes in Government Social Media Policies

Kristy Dalton | January 6, 2015

You probably know that developing a good social media policy for your agency is important. A solid policy guides staff, minimizes risk and helps citizens understand your approach to social. However, there are a few best practices that are commonly overlooked in the development of government social media policies.

Tone Deaf

Have you thought about the tone of your social media policy? It might seem trivial, but your policy should strive to be helpful, encouraging and optimistic. You want to send a message that your agency is not against social media — instead you recognize the tremendous value in these tools and want to be consistent and treat everyone fairly.

Social media still tends to make some people uncomfortable, whether due to lack of familiarity or concern about its application. Having a positive tone in your policy can go a long way toward acceptance for both internal staff and the public.

Excluding Elected Officials

Many policies cover employee use of social media, but leave out language pertaining to elected officials. Many elected officials want to embrace social media to better communicate with constituents, but some have indeed exercised bad social media judgment.

Your policy should include electeds in the "Responsibilities" section, which defines who is responsible for what. Department heads are responsible for assigning social media leads for their department, elected officials are responsible for abiding by laws pertaining to campaigning and open meetings as they relate to social media, etc. This language is especially important to employees who report directly to an elected official and may be asked to post on social networks on his or her behalf.

Dated Upon Rollout

A sure way to ensure your social media policy is outdated almost immediately upon rolling it out is to specifically reference platforms and strategies.

While it's important to broadly define social media terminology to ensure that everyone reading the policy is speaking the same language, the fact is that platforms change all the time. You do not want your policy to require updating and the lengthy approval process that can come along with it, every time a new Snapchat or Vine is introduced. Instead, define broad terms such as microblog, social network, video sharing platform, etc.

Social Media Policy Framework

References References overlap with other policies **Definitions** Broadly define social media terminology **Responsibilities** Who is responsible for what **Procedures** Typically the lengthiest section

- Account creation
- Logins and passwords
- Elected officials
- Comment policy
- Monitoring
- Archival
- Employee use

Where do you get specific about the approach to particular platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube? That magic is going to happen in your social media strategy document. One benefit of including this level of specificity in your strategy document is avoiding the delays that typically go along with pushing a policy update through the system. Just be sure to make a reference to the strategy document within your official policy.

Keeping it Under Wraps

Many public agencies do not typically make their internal policies available to the public. But make an exception for the social media policy and publish it in its entirety on your official government website. Going further, extract the portion of the policy that deals with comments and monitoring and publish a hyperlink to this section on key public areas like social media profile descriptions. This simplifies your policy for citizens because they will be able to easily find the portion that pertains to them.

There are several other important components to a good social media policy, but these four approaches should not be overlooked.

http://www.govtech.com/gov-experience/4-Common-Mistakes-in-Government-Social-Media-Policies.html