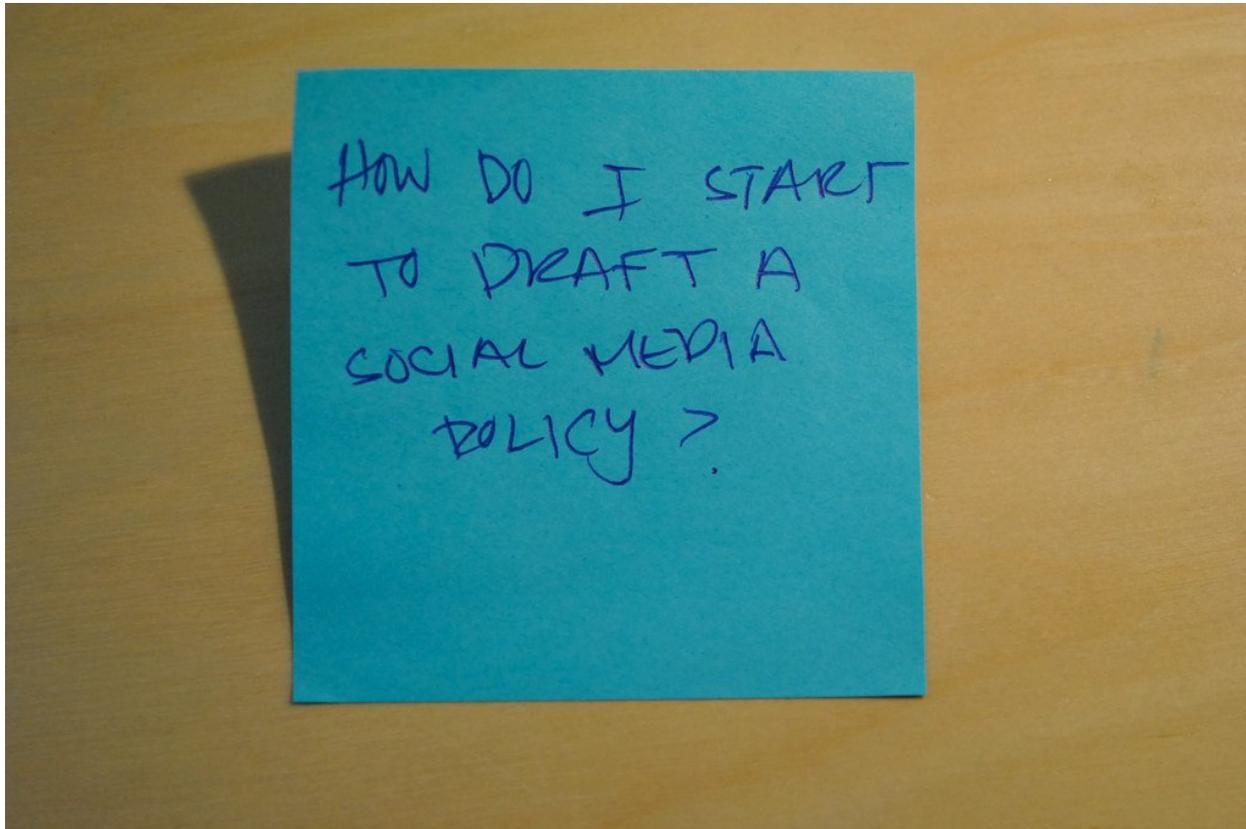


## Why Most Government Social Media Policies Suck

Kristy Dalton | January 11, 2017



I have read hundreds of city and county government social media policies, and it amazes me how common two major problems are: The policy is either way too sparse and skimps on some of the bases it should cover, or it's too convoluted and incomprehensible for the average employee or citizen.

As someone who has been in the government social media space since cities started creating profiles on social platforms a decade ago, I've seen up close what works and what can go terribly wrong.

Many government agencies want to get a policy in place quickly, but are not particularly confident that it is comprehensive enough. We ran a competition last year at the Government Social Media Conference to find the top government social media policies in the nation. Despite dozens of entries in our other competition categories related to social media content, can you guess how many agencies were confident enough to enter their social policy? Only three in the entire country. We actually had to eliminate that category due to the lack of entries.

When I review my clients' policies, I look for language related to employee use of social media. I have seen many agencies afraid to cover employee use in their policy because they are worried about getting in trouble for restricting the wrong things.

Your agency's elected officials or administrators must make decisions on what is allowed by employees on work time, and that guidance should be written in your policy. You might say that staff members officially designated as social media administrators are allowed to manage social media profiles on work time, but all other staff may not use the agency's network for personal social media during those hours. Or you may allow a minimal-use policy where a small amount of social media use on work time is acceptable.

Be crystal clear about privacy in your policy. You might caution employees that they have no expectation of privacy while using the Internet on employer equipment. If employees will be monitored, the policy should inform them of such monitoring. Also make sure to clearly state that employees should never post legally protected personal information that they have access to on the job.

The reality is that there is very little case law to guide us in the area of government social media policies. Don't get me wrong, agencies get sued all the time for their actions regarding social media. But cases are usually dismissed or settled out of court, so we don't have legal precedent in many areas.

You will need to make several tough decisions about employee use of social media, usage on work time and comment moderation. Decide based on best practices, then codify the rules in your policy. Do not avoid establishing policy, because I promise you it's much harder to react to a situation when there were never clear rules and expectations set forth in the first place.

One final thought, and it's an important one: Please, remember to take this approach using plain language. Your agency isn't just implementing a social media policy to legally cover your butt — it is important that employees and citizens actually understand it. Make it readable, searchable, publish it everywhere and constantly offer employee training.

<http://www.govtech.com/govgirl/Why-Most-Government-Social-Media-Policies-Suck.html>