



# DOS & DON'TS OF SOCIAL MEDIA

GLOUCESTER, SALEM, CUMBERLAND COUNTIES  
MUNICIPAL JOINT INSURANCE FUND (TRICOJIF)  
Annual Retreat: July 27<sup>th</sup> & 28<sup>th</sup>, 2022

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# Why Should Local Governments Be Active on Social Media?

- With 7 in 10 American adults saying they actively use Facebook, chances are that the vast majority of the constituents within your community are active on social media. Inactive local governments are missing out on the most important and convenient way to directly correspond with community members.
- Social media can be used by local governments for things like recruiting government workers and volunteers, promoting events, and directly corresponding with citizens about important local issues. Elected officials can also take advantage of the communicative nature of the platform to build relationships with community members.

# How Should Local Governments Be Using Social Media?

- Here are some of the best ways that a local government should leverage social media:

## Communicating With Constituents

- By getting local community members to follow your municipal government on social media, you're providing them with a resource to get valuable local information straight from a trusted source.
- Make regular posts to let community members know about important things, like emergency announcements (crisis communications), local news, work opportunities, and upcoming events.
- Community members will also be able to contact their local government directly via comments and direct messaging. This smooth communication will make residents feel like their voices are heard, will provide your local government with data on what issues constituents want addressed, and increase community trust in local government.



# Recruiting Government Workers and Volunteers

- With a hiring shortage for municipal governments across the country, recruitment has never been more difficult for local governments. Leveraging social media platforms to spread the word to the community will help with finding more potential candidates to get roles filled.
- Similarly, sharing volunteering opportunities directly with your community can help with organizing programs like community emergency response teams and other meaningful civic engagement projects.



# What Platforms Should Local Governments Be Active on?

- Ideally, government workers should receive social media training to be educated on how to best be active and engage on the top platforms.
- Here are some best practices for using each of the major platforms:

# How Local Governments Can Use Facebook



Facebook is considered the most popular social media platform among American adults. As a result, you should actively be posting meaningful content on there as regularly as possible.

Here are some best practices for leveraging Facebook as a local government:

- **Post photos and videos regularly:** people are much more likely to engage with a post if there's an eye-catching photo or video to go along with it.
- **Respond to comments:** Constituents will regularly be commenting on your posts. Whether that comment is positive or negative, responding directly will let people know that their government is paying attention and taking feedback seriously.
- **Live stream events:** going live on Facebook is an easy way for constituents to follow along with events they weren't able to attend in-person. Have a government worker livestream events like town hall meetings directly to people that follow your page.
- **Link off to important URLs:** If you're promoting something like an event or sharing a news story, provide value to community members by directly offering them a link with more details. Copy and pasting a URL into your post will embed it for people to access directly.
- Need help setting up your profile local governments account. Learn more about creating a local government page on Facebook.

# How Local Governments Can Use Twitter



Twitter can act as an incredible resource for your local government to convey critical information to community-members in real-time - whether it is about an upcoming community event like a parade, or more urgent event like a flood warning.

Here are some best practices for using Twitter as a municipality or county:

- **Use TweetDeck:** TweetDeck is a platform created by Twitter for monitoring engagement on your content, tracking relevant topics and hashtags, and responding to messages and replies directly. Using this platform will save your government workers time and keep them up to date on important news and constituent communications.
- **Follow Community Members and Local News Outlets:** Twitter is a great place to keep an eye out on what people and new sources are saying about your municipal government and workers. Be sure to keep an eye out on what's being said, and to retweet any meaningful information that your constituents should see.
- **Have Some Fun:** Twitter is one of those places on the Internet that brands and public institutions don't have to take themselves so seriously. The NJ State Government (@NJGOV) has hilariously embraced memes and humor in addition to serious content to make for a viral social-media account with close to 400,000 followers.

# How Local Governments Can Use Instagram



Instagram is a Facebook-owned social media platform with millions of active American users as well.

Here are some smart ways for local governments to use Instagram:

- **Use Facebook Business Suite:** To save time, consider using the Facebook Business Suite when uploading new posts. That will allow your municipal workers to automatically upload new Facebook posts to Instagram as well (and automatically go live on Instagram when live-streaming on Facebook)
- **Use the Link in Your Bio:** Instagram doesn't allow you to include URL links in your posts, meaning you'll have to select a link in your profile settings to display on your page. Consider getting a social media tool like Linkinbio to display multiple links from your profile.
- **Be Wise With Your Hashtag Selection:** Consider using hashtags on your post to increase exposure with relevant audiences. Use hashtags for your town and state to make sure that its seen by as many people within your neighborhood as possible.



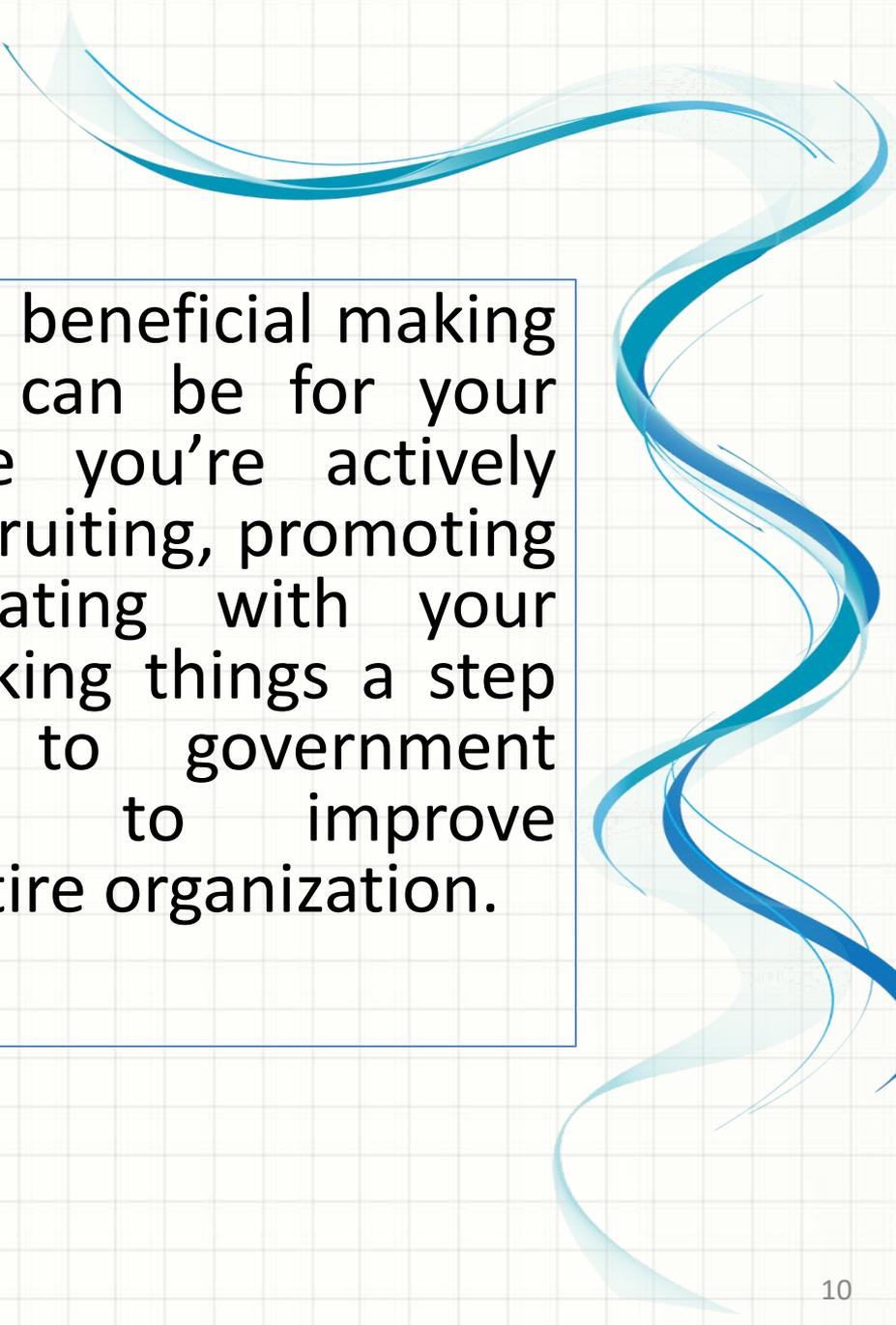
# How Local Governments Can Use NextDoor

While NextDoor is one of the newest social media platforms on the scene, it is arguably the most important at the local level. This platform is designed to connect people directly in their neighborhood to share local tips, spread local news, and establish relationships with neighbors with similar interests.

Pay attention to common trends on what's being discussed, and if one or multiple people are complaining about something within your government's jurisdiction, make note and try to alleviate the issue.

- **Share Work Opportunities and Events:** NextDoor automatically shares content with others in your neighborhood, meaning that any post made by your municipal government will automatically be seen by constituents. This is one of the wisest places to share work and volunteer opportunities and important updates that constituents need to be aware of.
- **Announce Events of Crime and Other Critical News:** If a crime is committed like a robbery, ensure public safety by informing them quickly via NextDoor so that they know to lock their doors and be on the lookout for suspicious activity.

# Is It Worth It?



Don't underestimate how beneficial making a digital transformation can be for your local government. Once you're actively using social media for recruiting, promoting events, and communicating with your constituents, consider taking things a step further by switching to government management software to improve workflows across your entire organization.

# 5 Tips For Using Social Media in Government



Top  
Tips

There are two types of social media accounts: **soapboxes and dinner parties**. A soapbox social media account focuses on *themselves*. They use social media to broadcast messages and issues without engaging with their audience.

On the other hand, a dinner party social media account invites audiences in and creates a dialogue with them. They encourage discussion and engagement between the host (you) and the guests (your audience).

You need to decide which type of account that you want to operate. If you're running an account for social media and government communications, here are five tips on how you can do exactly that:

# 1. Learn where your audience hangs out

You need to understand the channel where your target audience hangs out so that you're not wasting valuable time and resources posting into the void.

# 2. Share relevant, valuable content and information

Build audience trust and engagement by sharing relevant and interesting content, and audiences will naturally turn to you as a valid source of information and knowledge. The NASA Instagram account does this spectacularly well for its audience of over 76 million people across the world.



KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE

### 3. Engage with your Followers

Would you ever attend a dinner party and sit there silently, not joining in the conversation? Obviously not, and social media is no different. Government officials, lawmakers, and government accounts should consider engaging with their audiences by replying to messages, joining conversations, and answering questions.

Remember that social media is all about creating community. So consider asking questions, creating opinion polls (Twitter has a great feature that allows you to do this!) and responding to comments from your followers.

### 4. Stay Secure

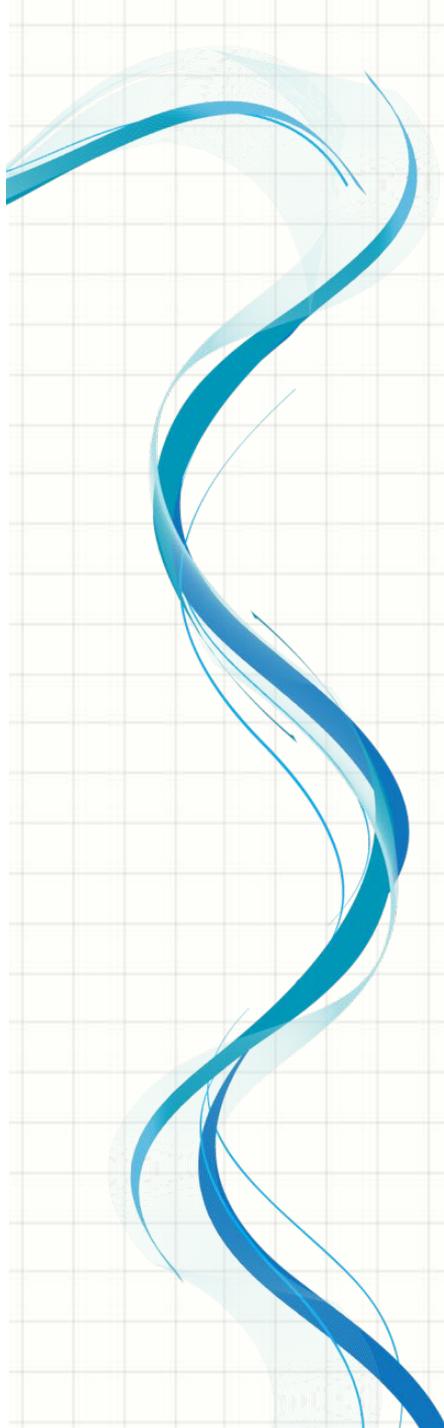
A social media security breach will seriously undermine the general public's confidence in government. The simplest way to ensure that your accounts stay secure is by onboarding a social media management platform to manage all your social media accounts and activity across multiple teams or people.

Hootsuite (a tool to assist with the management of your social media accounts) comes with two-factor authentication for an additional layer of security and gives you the complete control to review and approve messages, log all activity and interactions, and set up post review and approvals.

# 5. Remain Compliant



- Remaining compliant with privacy requirements is critical for any government body. For large organizations with multiple social media practitioners, establishing best practices for social media use (Adopting a Social Media Policy) can help ensure the collective compliance of all users.
- Guidelines towards acceptable and forbidden content, data handling, citizen engagement, and even tone are a few best practice examples organizations can implement to keep their team compliant.
- If you manage social media for a government or agency, stay compliant with the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), and other public records laws.



# Promote the Existence of Your Account

Once an account is created, don't forget to tell people about it. Too often an account is created and that's the end of it. You need to let residents know that the account exists and where to find it. If no one is following you, you have accomplished nothing in increasing the audience of your messages.

# Ways to Promote Your Accounts:



- Add social media buttons to your website.
- Include social media information in staff email signatures.
- Include social media information in mailings and on printed flyers.
- Post social media information on town hall bulletin boards.
- Advertise your accounts at town events.
- Tell your municipal departments about the account(s) and ask them to include this information in their mailings, email signature lines, at events and on their bulletin boards.
- Use hashtags.
- Embed your social media feed into your website's homepage.
- Add share buttons to the bottom of press releases posted on your website. This allows readers to easily share your news on their individual feeds, further increasing your reach and building your account's followers.

# Best Practices

- **Format Posts to Best Fit each Platform's Individual Standards**

For example, on Facebook you may include information for an event in paragraph form, but Twitter limits you to 140 characters. Do not post the information the same way across platforms; personalize the message for each platform so that it best fits with that platform's format.

- **Keep it Short**

If your post is too long, people will be less likely to read it. Provide the basics and link to the information on your website where you can provide more details.

- **Use Hashtags**

Hashtags define a keyword or topic of interest, and users may search by hashtag to find posts related to a topic. Using hashtags can increase the number of people viewing your posts. Hashtags are a popular way to search for hot topics. Be sure to look for existing hashtags that are already being used on social media before creating a new one.

# Best Practices cont.

- **Keep Promoting the Existence of Your Account**

Continue to promote your account so that continue to gain new followers.

- **Use Images, Infographics & Videos**

Use images to grab attention. Infographics are great for posting longer and more detailed messages. Videos are another great option, but be sure to include subtitles so that the videos are ADA compliant. Also, currently there is a trend for users to watch the videos in their feed with the sound off.

- **Utilize a Service that Links Multiple Accounts on 1 Dashboard**

There are online services available to help manage multiple accounts and schedule posts from one dashboard. Some companies offer this service for free and some are paid. Do your research to see which works best for you.

- **Shorten Links**

Shorten website links using a service such as bitly.com.

# Deleting Comments Made on Your Social Media Page



Can you delete comments made on your social media page? The short answer, it depends. A full analysis of this question requires a complex Constitutional Law analysis, and then attempting to apply case law from the civil-rights era to the new and mostly un-litigated area of social media.

The analysis of whether a social media comment can be deleted hinges upon the question – Is my municipal social media site government speech or is it a limited public forum? Government is free to have its own voice, and as such it does not necessarily need to provide a soapbox for a viewpoint counter to their own. However, government is not free to limit speech (delete social media comment) when that speech occurs in a public forum or a limited public forum.

# Deleting Comments Made on Your Social Media Page cont.

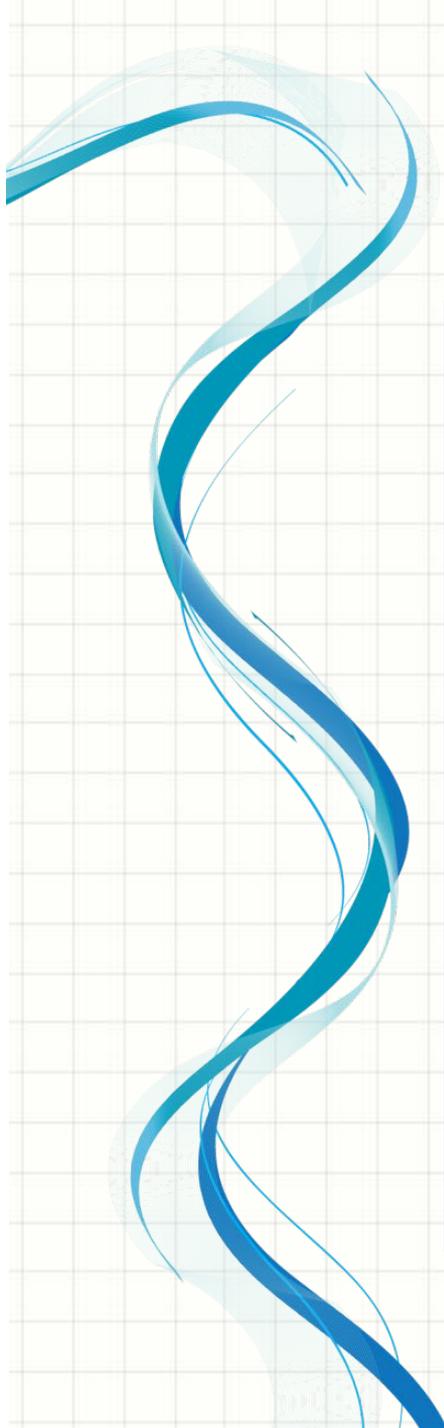
If your municipality uses social media to engage in public discussion and discourse then those platforms will most likely be considered a public forum or limited public forum and you would be restricted from deleting or limiting comments. A public forum or limited public forum analysis would need to be conducted in order to determine what restrictions on speech could be made.

In any case it is permissible and certainly good practice to establish rules of decorum and a policy which clearly outlines the rules and limitations on allowable comments. This kind of policy serves two purposes. First, it allows you to define the purpose and scope of your social media usage and could protect your social media sites from becoming a de facto public forum. Second, it puts potential commenters on notice that if their comments violate the established rules, then those comments will be deleted.

While the discussion above addresses the Constitutional issues surrounding the deletion or limiting of public comments there are other legal considerations. Chief among these other legal considerations are concerns with OPRA and record retention requirements. These issues must be considered anytime a social media post whether made by your staff or a public commenter is considered for deletion.

# Social Media Subject to OPRA & Record Retention Requirements

Posts and comments on social media are like any other public record and unless they fit into one of the few narrow exceptions they are subject to the Open Public Records Act (“OPRA”). More importantly, posts and comments on social media are subject to State record retention laws. This requirement includes posts which may have been deleted due to a violation of commenting policies. Therefore, great care should be taken to ensure that all social media posts are maintained according to the proper record retention schedule.

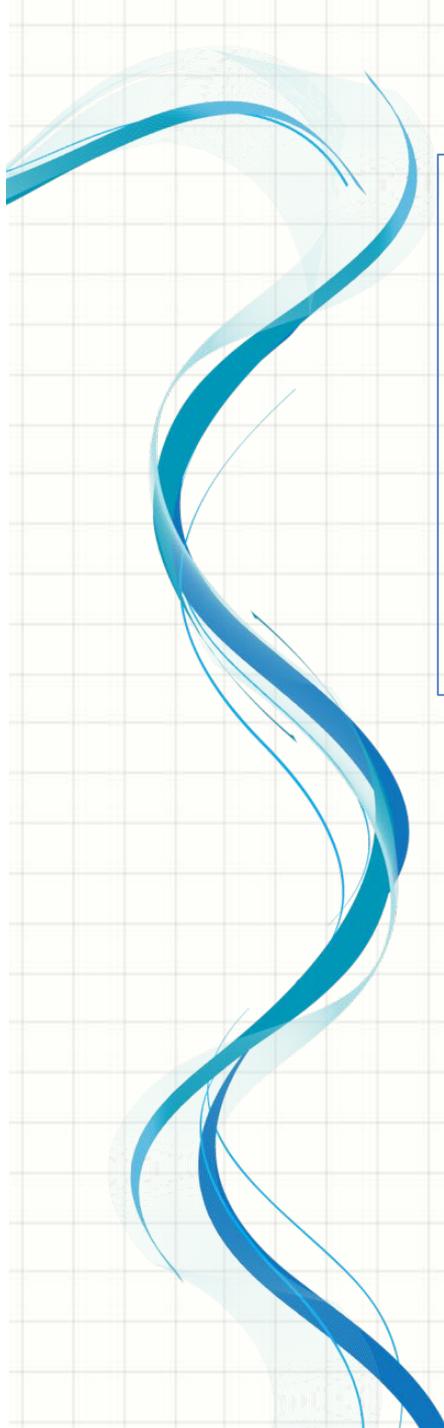


# Maintain Control

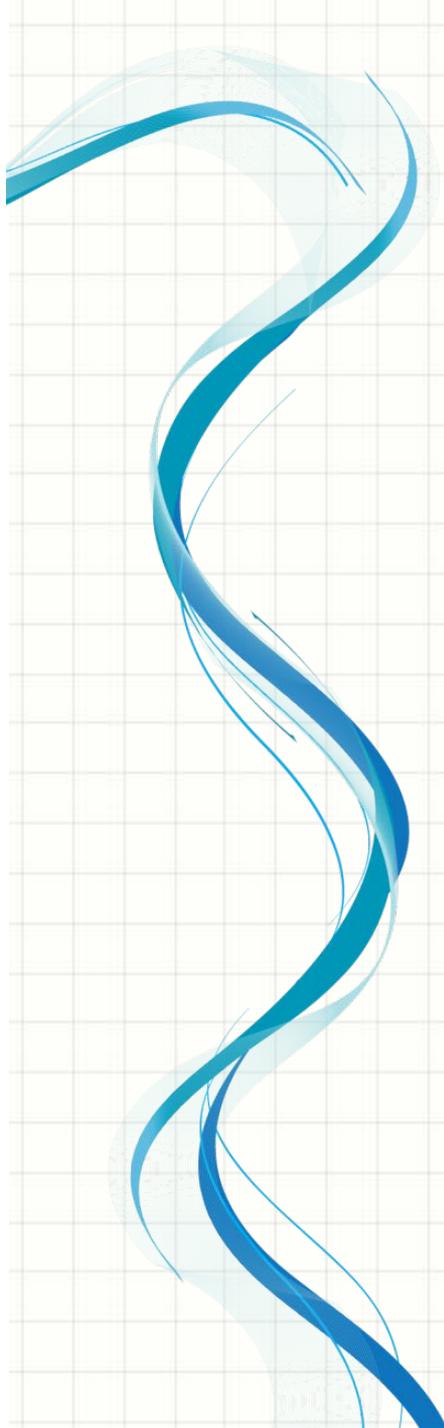
Unless the legislative body votes to vest control of social media in another board or official, the governing body (commissioners, manager/council, mayor/council) has ultimate responsibility for the use of social media. This responsibility includes decisions regarding which technologies to use, policies that will apply and how to spend the money appropriated for this purpose. Municipal employees or officials who are delegated responsibility or permitted to use such technologies should be required to follow all policies established by the governing body.

# Develop a Social Media Policy

- It is vital that your municipality creates a social media policy. A clear and comprehensive social media policy helps both the public and government employees understand how your social media sites are used and can help to avoid any future complications.
- While no law requires the governing body to create policies regarding the use of social media, it is highly advisable to do so. Websites, blogs and all other social media can expose a municipality to liability. The best way to avoid these pitfalls is to have a carefully written policy for everyone to follow. Any such policy should be reviewed by the municipal attorney before it is formally adopted by the governing body, and then periodically reviewed with the attorney to see if adjustments need to be made. Don't be afraid to adjust the policies as appropriate.

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- Examples of Policies are included in your Retreat Binder
  - The National League of Cities also has a comprehensive guide for creating a policy specific to local government. See copy included in your Retreat Binder





# Disclaimers Aren't a Silver Bullet

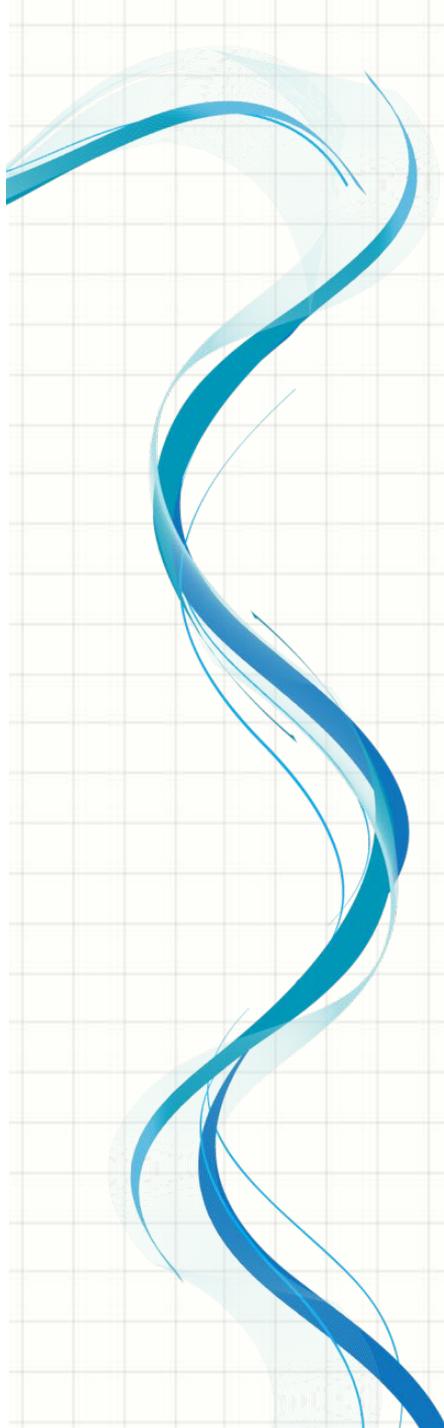
While a disclaimer may be informative, it is generally ineffective in reducing or eliminating a municipality's risk of liability. A website, blog, Facebook account or other networking tool will be run or endorsed by the municipality and funded with municipal money. Since all of these communication channels will be under the control of the governing body, and they will remain ultimately responsible for content and distribution, it is hard to see how a municipality could disclaim responsibility for that content. If a municipality wishes to include disclaimers, those disclaimers should be reviewed by the municipal attorney before they are posted to determine whether they will, in fact, be helpful.

# Posting of Photographs of Minors

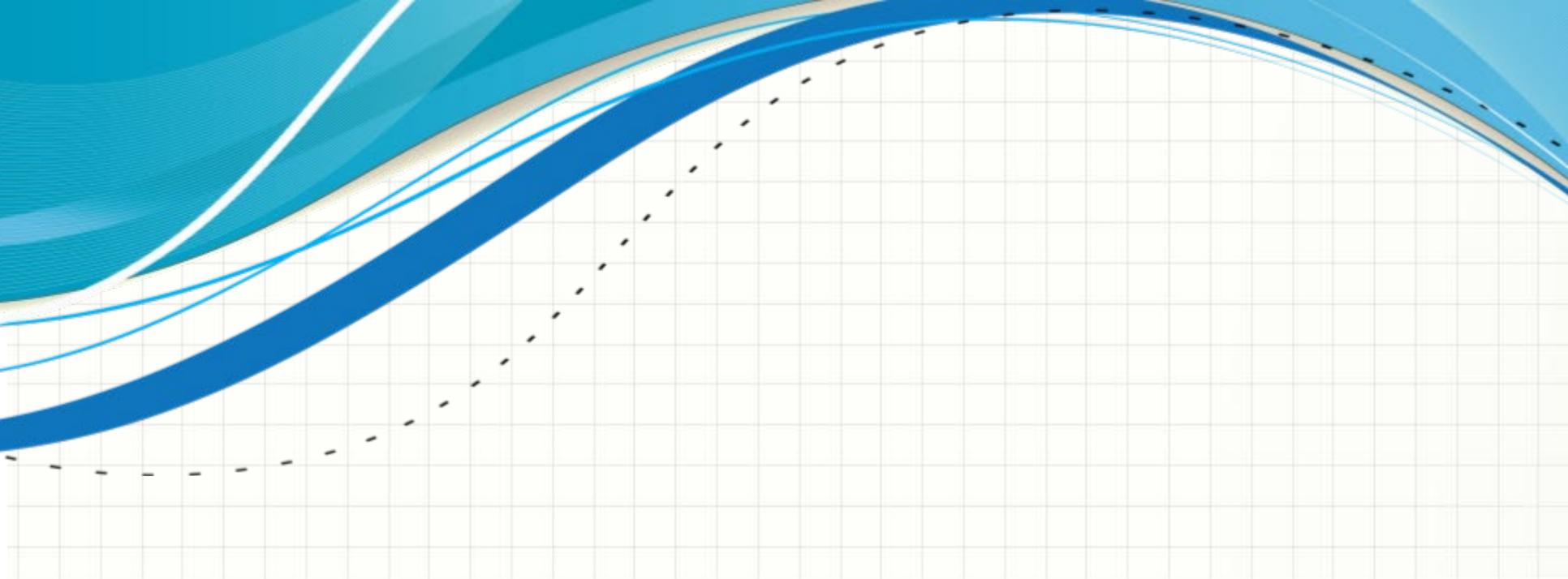
## **MEL Recommended Policy:**

- Under no circumstances are any images of any child taken during any of the activities conducted or sponsored by the municipality to be shared on any social media platform without the expressed written consent of a parent or legal guardian.



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- The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) adopted the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA) which gives parents control over what information websites can collect from their children. The COPPA Rule puts additional protections in place and streamlines other procedures that companies covered by the Rule need to follow.
  - It is likely that COPPA would be considered applicable to public entities.
  - A copy of the Six-Step Compliance Plan is included in the Retreat Binder.





**QUESTIONS?**