

SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY – TOWNSHIP OF BRANCBURG, NJ

PURPOSE

This policy sets forth guidelines for the establishment and use by the Township of Branchburg, its officials, officers, employees, agents, designees, representatives and/or volunteers ("the Township") of its social media sites (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, You Tube and/or any other similar type platform) as a means of conveying Township-related information to its residents, employees and/or visitors. The Township has an overriding interest and expectation in deciding what is “spoken” on behalf of the Township on its own social media sites.

The purpose of this social media policy is to establish enforceable rules for the use of social media by Township officials, officers, employees, agents, designees, representatives and/or volunteers when engaged in Township business. Social media refers to Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube and/or any other communication site/application that is open to response or comment. Rules are necessary to assure that communications made on behalf of the Township are properly authorized and in correct form; that communications to the municipality by means of social media which can be viewed by the public are appropriate and pertinent; that all communications to the municipality is related to the posted municipal information; and, that the sender is clearly and fully informed that a message received by means of social media is not a substitute for required reporting procedures.

For purposes of this policy, “social media” is understood to be content created by individuals, using accessible, expandable, and upgradable publishing technologies, through and on the Internet. Examples of social media include Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and You Tube. For purposes of this policy, “comments” include, but are not limited to, information, articles, and pictures. It also includes other communication medium created by the Township, including but not limited to, the Township website, GovDelivery and/or the Public Education and Government Access Channels.

SCOPE

This policy shall apply to all Township agencies and departments, as well as any and all affiliated government or non-government agency and/or official and/or board, commission, or committee permitted by the Township to post on Township social media sites.

GENERAL POLICY

The objective of the use of social media by the Township or its Departments is to expand and facilitate the dissemination of information from the Township to its residents, taxpayers and the general public.

1. No Township social media site shall be established without prior approval of the Township Administrator. The following social media sites are approved by the Township Committee under the direction of the Township Administrator and/or designee:

Facebook:

- Township of Branchburg Local Government
- Township of Branchburg Recreation Department

2. The Township social media sites shall clearly set forth that they are maintained by the Township of Branchburg and that they follow this Social Media Policy.

3. Wherever possible, the Township social media sites shall link back to the official Township website for forms, documents, online services and other information necessary to conduct business with the Township.
4. The Township's social media sites are not to be used for making any official communications to the Township of Branchburg. Examples of such communications include, but are not limited to, reporting crime and/or misconduct, reporting dangerous conditions, requesting an inspection, giving notice required by any statute, by ordinance and/or regulations such as notices of claim. Prominent notice of this paragraph shall be displayed on every Township social media site, along with the appropriate contact information for submitting official communications.
5. This social media policy shall also be placed so it can be displayed and viewed on the Township's website and all Township social media sites.
6. The Township Administrator and/or designee shall monitor the Township's social media sites to ensure adherence to this herein Social Media Policy and to the interests and goals of the Township of Branchburg. The Township has the right to and will restrict and/or remove any content that is deemed in violation of this Social Media Policy or any applicable law. Any content removed based on these guidelines will be retained by the Township Administrator and/or designee pursuant to the applicable Township retention policy, including the time, date and identity of the poster, when available.
7. These guidelines must be displayed to users or made available by hyperlink.
8. The Township will approach the use of social media tools as consistently as possible, Township-wide.
9. The Township website at www.branchburg.nj.us shall remain the Township's primary and predominant internet presence.
10. The Township's social media sites and this Policy are subject to all applicable federal and NJ laws and regulations, as well as applicable record retention requirements.
11. Employees and volunteers representing the Township's government, via its social media site(s), shall conduct themselves at all times as a representative of the Township and in accordance with all its policies.
12. This Social Media Policy may be revised at any time by approval of the Township Committee.
13. This Policy governs all social media use by or on behalf of the Township and/or its departments, boards, commissions, committees, agencies, etc.
14. Only the Township shall establish and operate the social media sites indicated in item #1 and approved for use by the Township Committee. No other social media sites for the Township shall be authorized.
15. All of the Township's uses of social media are responsible for complying with applicable federal, state, and county laws, regulations, and policies. This includes, but is not limited to, adherence to established laws and policies regarding copyright, records retention, Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), Open Public Record Act (OPRA), First (1st) Amendment, privacy laws, Open Public Meetings Act (OPMA or "sunshine law"), and information security policies (if applicable) established by the Borough.

16. All Township of Branchburg policies are applicable to interactions on social media sites when acting in an official capacity and representing the Borough.

17. No “friending” or other special relationship between a Township official, officer, employee, agent, designee, representative and/or volunteer and a third (3rd) person is permitted on, and/or working on, a Township social media site(s).

18. The Township reserves the right to disable its social media accounts either temporarily or permanently at any time. There is no guarantee of “uptime.”

COMMENT POLICY

1. As a public entity, the Township must abide by certain standards to serve all of its constituents in a civil and unbiased manner.

2. The intended purpose behind establishing the Township’s social media sites is to disseminate information from the Township of Branchburg about the Township to its citizens, residents, employees and/or visitors.

3. A comment posted by a member of the public on any Township social media site is the opinion of the commentator or poster only. Publication of a comment does not imply an endorsement of, or agreement by, the Township nor do such comments reflect the opinions and/or policies of the Township.

4. Any attempt to hack or otherwise compromise any of the Township’s internet and/or social media sites will be immediately reported to law enforcement and the perpetrator shall be denied access to the sites immediately.

5. The Township reserves the right to deny access to any and/or all of its social media sites for any individual, group or entity who violates the Township of Branchburg’s Social Media Policy at any time and without any prior notice.

6. Since it is the Township’s intent to strictly disseminate information, the comment feature on all social media sites will be disabled to the extent possible; in the event comments are not or cannot be disabled the following will apply:

a. All comments posted to any of the Township’s social media sites are bound by any applicable terms and conditions of Facebook’s Statement of Rights and Responsibilities, located at <http://www.facebook.com/terms.php>; of Twitter’s Terms of Service, located at <https://twitter.com/tos>; of YouTube’s Terms of Service, located at <https://www.youtube.com/t/terms>; of Instagram Terms of Service, located at <https://instagram.com/tos>; and the Township reserves the right to report any violation of these Rights and Responsibilities to the appropriate agency with the intent of having the agency take the appropriate and reasonable responsible action. All of the Township of Branchburg’s policies are applicable to interactions on social media sites when acting in an official capacity and representing the Township.

10. Township municipal employees are strictly prohibited from commenting on any of the Township’s social media sites.

11. No Township employee, Township elected official, vendor performing work and/or providing services to the Township, and/or volunteer may post or comment on any Township social media site.

12. Persons posting prohibited content shall be subject to being barred from posting comments on Township social media immediately and without any prior notice.

PROHIBITED CONTENT

1. Comments containing any of the following inappropriate forms of content shall not be permitted on any of the Township's social media sites and are subject to removal and/or restriction by the Township Administrator and/or designees:

a. Profane, obscene, violent, and/or pornographic content and/or language, and/or sexually suggestive and/or explicit content links to such materials. Any image or link containing minors or suspected minors in any questionable situations will be reported to law enforcement;

b. Content that promotes, fosters and/or perpetuates discrimination on the basis of race, creed, color, age, religion, gender, or national origin, marital status, status with regard to public assistance, physical or mental disability or sexual orientation;

c. Defamatory attacks;

d. Threats to any person or organization;

e. Solicitation of commerce, including but not limited to advertising of any business or product for sale;

f. Conduct in violation of any federal, state or local law;

g. Encouragement of any illegal activity or possible illegal activity;

h. Information that may tend to compromise the safety or security of the public or public systems;

i. Content that violates a legal ownership interest, such as a copyright, of any party the Township does not permit or allow copyright infringing activities and/or infringement of intellectual property rights on its website or social media sites and will remove any and all content and submissions if properly notified that such content and/or submission infringes on another's intellectual property rights;

j. Private contact information such as names, addresses and phone numbers no matter how easily obtained elsewhere; as well as personal information of a person other than the poster;

k. Spamming or repetitive content;

l. Comments from children under the age of thirteen (13) cannot be posted in order to comply with the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act. By posting on a Borough media site, users acknowledge that they are at least thirteen (13) years old. Parents shall be responsible for any minor child's posting or comments;

m. Content that incites violence and/or could lead to violence;

- n. Photographs and/or videos;
- o. Comments unrelated to the particular post being commented upon;
- p. Comments which contain vulgar, offensive, threatening, or harassing language, personal attacks, or unsupported accusations;
- q. Persons posting prohibited content are subject to being barred from posting comments on the Township's social media sites.
- r. Only the content approved by the Township Administrator or designee for public release is allowed to be posted. Content of a sensitive nature shall not be allowed to be posted. Officials, officers, employees, agents, designees, representatives, volunteers, and/or vendors providing services to the Township are prohibited from posting comments.
- s. A "designee" or a person appointed by the Township Administrator is never allowed to transfer their social media account information to anyone and/or allow anyone access to the Township's accounts on their behalf without prior written authorization from the Township Committee or Township Administrator.

BREACH OF POLICY

1. The Township Administrator and/or designees may be required to remove internet postings on Township social media sites which are deemed to constitute a breach of this Policy, as determined by the Township Administrator, subject to applicable archiving and retention requirements.
2. Any social media site created by the Township remains the sole property of the Township of Branchburg, including all the followers and friends generated by the site(s). If the person who created the site leaves the employment of the Township, they must relinquish anything and everything related to the site including, but not limited to, user names, passwords and/or access codes or information.

TERMS OF USE DISCLOSURE *(to be posted on all Township Social Media Sites)*

A. Information Disclaimer

By visiting this site, you understand and agree that this Township of Branchburg local government site is provided "AS IS". Township of Branchburg local government makes every effort to provide accurate and complete information on this website. The information contained herein is not official nor in any way shall it be deemed to constitute legal notice where such legal notice is required by law. The information contained in this site is provided as a service and convenience to people needing information about the Township of Branchburg local government. Portions of the information on this site may be incorrect or not current. Township of Branchburg local government, its officials, officers, employees, agents, designees, representatives and/or volunteers shall not be liable for damages or losses of any kind arising out of or in connection with the use or performance of information, including but not limited to, damages or losses caused by reliance upon the accuracy or timeliness of any such information, or damages incurred from the viewing, distributing, or copying of those materials.

B. Linking Policy -- Links To External Sites

The Township of Branchburg local government site may contain links to outside websites. These websites are not owned, operated, controlled and/or reviewed by the Township of Branchburg local government. These links are provided solely as a courtesy and convenience to you, the visitor. The Township of Branchburg local government, its officers or employees, exercise no control over the organizations, views, accuracy, copyright and/or trademark, compliance and/or the legality of the material contained in these outside websites. The Township of Branchburg local government, its officials, officers, employees, agents, designees, representatives and/or volunteers do not sponsor, endorse and/or approve the information, content, proceeds, materials, opinions and/or services contained on such outside websites. The visitor proceeds to these outside websites at his/her own risk. The Township of Branchburg local government specifically disclaims any and all liability from damages, which may result from the accessing of a third-party site, which is linked to the Township of Branchburg local government website or from reliance upon only such information.

C. Endorsement Disclaimer

Reference in this website to any specific commercial products, processes, or services, or the use of any trade firm or corporation name is for the information and convenience of the public, and does not constitute endorsement, recommendation, or favoring by the Township of Branchburg or its officials, officers, employees, agents, designees, representatives and/or volunteers.

D. Copyright and Trademark Limitations

The Township of Branchburg makes no warranty that materials contained herein are free of copyright or trademark claims or other restrictions or limitations on free use or display. Making a copy of such material shall be subject to copyright and/or trademark laws.

E. Use of material from this site

The Township of Branchburg has made the content of these pages available to the public and anyone may view, copy and/or distribute *Township of Branchburg local government information* found here without obligation to the Township of Branchburg local government for non-commercial, personal use only, unless otherwise stated on particular material or information to which a restriction on free use may apply.

The design of this site, original graphics, and original content are all copyrighted by the Township of Branchburg and may not be re-engineered, distributed, modified, transmitted, re-used, reposted, or duplicated without the express written permission of the Township of Branchburg in each instance. All requests to use any part of the original design, code, graphics or content of this site should be made via e-mail to the Township Administrator.

F. Unauthorized Modifications

Unauthorized attempts to modify or otherwise alter any information or image stored on any Township of Branchburg local government website/social media platform page(s) may result in criminal prosecution.