

Government agencies are increasingly looking to leverage social media to improve the quality of government services and enable greater citizen engagement. Publicly available social media sites, such as Facebook or Twitter, are providing governments with attractive options for meeting these new objectives. These sites are widely available to government employees and citizens with Internet access; they have established communities and networks; and they provide a wide range of audio, video, and interactive capabilities without substantial costs.

While there are many high profile examples of government agencies engaging social media tools, for the vast majority of governments across the US, these tools are still fairly new and relatively unexplored. The process of adopting new tools and managing the related changes in work processes and policies is not easy for any type of organization. But governments at all levels are starting to put more and more effort into figuring out social media tools that involves exploring new ways of working and shifting communication patterns. It also involves the creation of new policies and guidelines to encourage proper use and to mitigate the risks of social media tools.

Developing a social media policy can be an important first step for those government agencies considering using social media and can ultimately serve as a key enabler for responsibly and effectively leveraging social media tools. Yet, many governments are struggling with what such a policy should encompass and convey. Not surprisingly, given the emergent nature of social media, relatively few U.S. governments actually have a formalized set of policies to guide their own efforts, as well as for others to draw on or learn from. As a consequence, governments are faced with reinterpreting and applying old policies that govern the use of the Internet or creating completely new policies.

To help fill the gap in what is known about social media policy in government, the Center for Technology in Government undertook an effort to identify as many government social media policies as possible, to review those policies for patterns in content and approach, to talk with those experienced in developing these policies and those seeking guidance in this area, and to produce a new resource to guide government social media policy development efforts. The study begins to answer the question, what are the core elements of a government social media policy? Our analysis identified eight essential elements for a social media policy: 1) employee access, 2) account management, 3) acceptable use, 4) employee conduct, 5) content, 6) security, 7) legal issues, and 8) citizen conduct.

The analysis focused on 26 publicly available government social media documents, and results from interviews with 32 government professionals who were already using or were considering using social media tools<sup>(1)</sup>. Overall, our search identified two types of documents being used by governments to communicate with employees about the use of social media: 1) guidelines and 2) policies. Of the 26 documents we reviewed, 10 were official social media policies, 12 were social media guidelines, and 4 were a mixture of both. In general, guidelines provide advice on how to best use social media tools to achieve a desired result, such as eliciting citizen engagement or providing suggestions for creating interesting content. Policies, on the other hand, represent official positions that govern the use of social media by employees in government agencies, such as detailing what constitutes acceptable use or outlining official processes for gaining access to social media sites.

The documents we reviewed varied with respect to the degree of detail devoted to any one element, with some covering a range of elements in brief, and others covering fewer elements in greater detail.<sup>(2)</sup> For instance, the United States (US) General Services Administration (GSA) *Handbook for Social Media* combines both policy and guidelines into one document, with the goal of creating a one-stop-shop for informing employees about all aspects of social media use. Some, such as the *New Media and the Air Force* handbook, comprehensively detail the agency's overall policy, strategy, and preferred way to engage with the public. Meanwhile the *State of Utah Social Media Guidelines* focused on specific elements such as the "rules of engagement" with social media for employees.

This report provides a brief overview of social media use in government with particular focus on the types of use by government professionals; it then presents detailed descriptions of the eight essential elements identified through the analysis; and closes with brief guidance on strategies for getting started.

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(1) For a detailed methodology and a list of all reviewed policies, see Appendix A and B.

(2) Appendix C contains a table detailing coverage of the eight components within each of the 26 reviewed documents.