2026

Social Media Policy

HUMBOLDT COUNTY ASSOCIATION OF GOVERNMENTS
SEPTEMBER 2026

PURPOSE

This document defines the social media policy for Humboldt County Association of Governments, hereinafter referred to as "HCAOG." HCAOG will use social media tools and other emerging media platforms in specific ways to reach a broader audience and increase citizen engagement. HCAOG encourages using diverse communication platforms, where appropriate, to further HCAOG's goals by disseminating information about HCAOG's mission, meetings, activities, and current issues to members of the public.

HCAOG aims to effectively use social media accounts to:

- Provide information.
- Assist with recruitment efforts.
- Provide an information sharing channel that is accessible and approachable to community members.

GENERAL POLICIES

a. The most appropriate uses of social media tools are as informational channels to increase HCAOG's ability to broadcast its messages to the widest possible audience. All official agency-related communication through social media should remain professional in nature, though HCAOG also recognizes that approachable and relatable communications are often more effective than communications that are unnecessarily bureaucratic or heavily technical. Accordingly, all agency-related communications will prioritize professionalism while striving to also be understandable.

b. Employees must not use official agency social media for political purposes, to conduct private commercial transactions, or to engage in private business activities. HCAOG employees should be mindful that inappropriate use of official agency social media can be grounds for disciplinary action. Only individuals authorized by HCAOG's Executive Director may publish content to the agency's online platforms.

c. Nothing in this policy is intended to restrict employees' lawful use of personal social media. Employees may identify HCAOG as their employer or discuss matters of public concern in their personal capacity, provided they do not represent or imply that they are speaking on behalf of HCAOG unless authorized to do so. Employees must not use personal social media in such a way that overtly suggests or indirectly implies that they officially represent HCAOG. HCAOG employees are expected to ensure that their private/personal social media accounts and content do not represent or imply that such are official HCAOG accounts or official communications of HCAOG. Employees of HCAOG may not create, maintain, or contribute to any personal, private, or unaffiliated social media accounts in a manner that could be misinterpreted as being official HCAOG accounts. For example, each of the following hypothetical scenarios could lead members of the general public to believe that a staff member's personal account is an official source of HCAOG information:

- Breaking news: In this example, breaking news/information is released on a staff member's private social media account prior to the public release of the news/information via any official HCAOG channel (such as website, press release, official social media accounts, etc.). In other words, HCAOG staff can use their own social media to reference content that has already been officially publicly released by HCAOG, but private social media accounts should never be the first place that official HCAOG information is announced, shared, or distributed.
- Misleading or ambiguous account naming: Employees are strongly discouraged from utilizing the following abbreviations or their associated terms in the names of any private social media accounts: “HCAOG,” “JPA,” “RTPA,” “COG,” etc. For instance, fictional HCAOG employee John Smith could cause confusion among the public by creating and posting to an Instagram account called “HCAOG_JS” or “JohnSmithsHCAOG-news.”
- Facilitating or hosting public comment forums focused on HCAOG business: Employees shall not host or facilitate any online or social media accounts or forums that give members of the public the impression that such accounts/forums are official or formal platforms for public discourse regarding official HCAOG business.

d. Initial establishment of all HCAOG social media sites/platforms/apps shall be approved by the Executive Director.

e. All social media communications composed, sent, or received on HCAOG equipment are the property of HCAOG. While the social media sites are administered by HCAOG, the content on the sites is not entirely controlled by HCAOG.

f. HCAOG staff will do their best to prevent private commercial interests from using HCAOG social media sites. HCAOG does not endorse any links or advertisements on its social media sites placed by the site owners or their vendors or partners.

g. HCAOG's social media sites are subject to California's civil discovery statutes and the California Public Records Act. Content created or maintained in a social media format that relates to HCAOG business, including lists of subscribers and posted communications, may constitute a public record subject to disclosure under the California Public Records Act.

h. California law and HCAOG's records retention policy apply to social media formats and social media content. HCAOG shall preserve records as required pursuant to HCAOG's records retention policy for the required retention period in a format that preserves the integrity of the original record and is easily accessible so that it can be produced in response to a request. In the case of the elimination of an account or content, HCAOG will archive documentation of the removed content, which shall be retained in accordance with HCAOG's records retention policy.

i. HCAOG owns its official social media accounts and associated credentials. Accounts must be established using HCAOG-controlled contact information when practicable, login credentials must be maintained securely, and access must be removed promptly when an employee or contractor no longer needs it, when employment ends or when the applicable consultant contract ends.

j. HCAOG social media sites shall be managed consistent with the Brown Act, the Political Reform Act, and the California Elections Code. HCAOG staff members, members of the HCAOG Board, members of advisory bodies, and consultants working for HCAOG shall comply with the Brown Act when using social media and shall not use HCAOG social media sites to engage in prohibited serial communications, collective deliberation outside a noticed meeting, or other communications prohibited by applicable law.

k. In compliance with all other provisions within this overall policy, including record retention, HCAOG reserves the right to terminate HCAOG social media sites at any time without notice. In compliance with the policy stated above regarding the deletion of social media content, the HCAOG Executive Director may direct the deletion of a social media account that is deemed by the Director to be underutilized, inappropriate, or ineffective.

POSTING

All content posted to agency social media should be:

- Relevant – Information that engages citizens and pertains to HCAOG and/or partner agencies' work, missions, and goals;
- Timely – Pertains to deadlines, upcoming events, current news, new innovations, or recent trends; and
- Actionable or Inspirational – Either prompts citizens to take action or inspires them to want to take action in the future.

What Not to Post:

HCAOG employees or authorized designees may not publish content on HCAOG social media sites that includes:

- Confidential information.
- Copyrighted material without permission.
- Profane, racist, sexist, threatening, or derogatory content or comments.
- Partisan political views.
- Endorsements of private commercial interests.

Comment Policy

HCAOG shall disable discussion boards, comments, and the ability for those outside HCAOG to post directly on an HCAOG social media page/wall.

It is HCAOG's intent to use social media to share relevant information regarding HCAOG activities, and the activities of our member and partner agencies (such as Tribal Governments, Caltrans, and other regional joint powers agencies). HCAOG will not use social media as a discussion forum and

as such all HCAOG posts will have comments disabled. HCAOG shall make clear to users and visitors to HCAOG's social media sites that the intended purpose of the site is to serve as a means of information sharing between HCAOG and the community at large.

SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

HUMBOLDT COUNTY ASSOCIATION OF GOVERNMENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF RECEIPT OF HCAOG'S SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

I have received a copy of the Humboldt County Association of Governments' Social Media Policy.

I understand and agree that it is my responsibility to familiarize myself with and abide by this policy.

I have read and understand this policy.

_____ _____

Signature Date

_____

Print Name