

# IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY

## Extension and Outreach

### **Social Media Personal Usage *Best Practices***

#### **I. Purpose**

- A. Iowa State University Extension and Outreach is committed to the highest standards of freedom of speech and expression. Iowa State University Extension and Outreach would like to see all staff embody the [Extension Professional's Creed](#) throughout their personal and professional communications. Iowa State University Extension and Outreach recognizes that social media is an important and timely means of communication. However, the use of social media postings that include job-related information should be self-moderated. The purpose of this document is:
  - 1. To provide best practices outlining how Iowa State University Extension and Outreach employees, contractors, and volunteers can engage in the appropriate use of social media platforms;
  - 2. To minimize the business, legal, and personal risks that may arise from an individual's use of social media; and
  - 3. To protect the privacy and safety of Iowa State University Extension and Outreach employees, contractors, volunteers, and participants, including minors.
- B. By providing these best practices, Iowa State University Extension and Outreach hopes to better advance the work of extension by articulating our communication expectations and protecting the integrity and reputation of our organizations and programs.

#### **II. Scope**

- A. The best practices reviewed in this document apply to all state and county staff, council members, students, contractors, and volunteers (throughout this document, these individuals will be commonly referred to as "staff") who choose to use social media to communicate, collaborate, and interact with staff, stakeholders, and general public on matters concerning or impacting Iowa State University Extension and Outreach.
- B. This document and best practices should be read to help staff who choose to share extension-related content, programming, research, events, or anything else associated with Iowa State University Extension and Outreach through their personal social media accounts.
- C. Iowa State University Extension and Outreach does not require staff to post extension content on their personal social media accounts.
- D. Should staff choose to post extension-related content, this document and best practices apply to all content on a personal social media account. This includes but is not limited to posts related to personal matters, opinions, or reviews.
- E. This document may apply to employees outside of work hours and while using personal accounts when use of social media affects an individual's professional responsibilities, violates an applicable law, or constitutes a violation of Iowa State University regulation or policy. You are personally responsible for what you post. If

you are unsure about a work-related posting, seek approval from your supervisor or manager before posting it.

- F. This document and best practices do not apply to Iowa State University Extension and Outreach-affiliated social media accounts. Iowa State University Extension and Outreach-affiliated social media accounts should follow the Social Media Best Practices found on MyExtension.

### III. **Definitions**

- A. **Personal Use:** For the purpose of this document, “personal use” is defined as social media activity using your own personal or professional social media accounts, and not official university sponsored or approved accounts. Please note that university employees may be held responsible for their personal postings if their speech is considered part of their official university employment duties.
- B. **Social Media:** The term “social media” refers to various types of interactive communities typically accessed through the Internet and mobile applications (apps) either by mobile device or computers. The communities are usually characterized by user-generated content, user-shared content, or areas designed for free and open discussion, or can be a mix of all three.
- C. **Post:** The term “post” or “posting” refers to content posted on any social media outlet. This content could be in the form of an original post, a retweet or share, or even a “like” or “favorite” of a post originating from someone else.
- D. Social media outlets, including discussions boards, may or may not be monitored or regulated. It is up to each user of a social media outlet or participant in a virtual discussion to regulate their content that is added or shared with the community.
- E. Social media includes, but is not limited to, blogs (Blogger, Blogspot, Wordpress, etc.), photo and/or video-sharing sites and apps (YouTube, Flickr, Instagram, SnapChat, TikTok, etc.), e-zines (digital magazines), wikis (Wikipedia), social networks (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Pinterest, etc.), video and audio podcasts (posted to the web or hosted by applications, such as iTunes), ratings sites and apps (Urbanspoon, Yelp, Rate My Professor, etc.), and discussion sections of web pages or applications (comment section under articles on news or information websites).

### IV. **Social Media Best Practices**

- A. Individuals should make every effort to present themselves in a mature, responsible, and professional manner when utilizing social media. Communications should always be civil and respectful. Please be aware that no privatization measure is perfect and undesigned persons may still gain access to your networking site. Further, litigation involving such issues is complex, as the content on social media sites is easily misconstrued, permanent, discoverable by courts, and utilized in these adversarial proceedings. Any digital exposure can “live on” beyond its removal from the original website and continue to circulate in other venues.
- B. Tagging Iowa State University Extension and Outreach statewide accounts is a preferred practice when posting about extension-related news and events. This practice serves to broaden your reach and gain more attention for your programs. If you find yourself hesitating to tag extension-affiliated accounts due to the material you are posting, you may need to further evaluate your posting behaviors.

- C. Think carefully before you post any information on a website or social media channel, and consider your goals in participating. Make sure you are choosing the most relevant platform and adding value to the discussion. Listen before you engage and always be modest, respectful, and professional in your actions. To help facilitate these goals, the following best practices are encouraged:
1. Read and implement the [Iowa State University Principles of Community](#) and embody these principles as you post on social media.
  2. Make sure your posts are relevant and accurate.
  3. Identify yourself and be clear that you are sharing your personal views and that they do not represent the views of the University or Iowa State University Extension and Outreach. When engaging in such personal activities, you may not use your university title in any way that would imply that you are speaking for the university. It is suggested users add the following disclaimer: The views expressed on this site are mine alone and do not necessarily reflect the views of Iowa State University (or Iowa 4-H).
  4. Be careful not to reveal confidential or proprietary information about university students, employees, or participants. Adhere to all applicable university, federal and NCAA privacy and confidentiality policies. All employees of the University are subject to FERPA, HIPAA, and other laws mandating the nondisclosure of personal information.
  5. Utilize citations whenever possible and follow all applicable copyright, fair use, and intellectual property rules, regulations, and laws. This also reinforces the research and efforts of Iowa State University Extension and Outreach.
  6. Refrain from speculation on the future of university and extension and outreach practices. Keep topics focused on matters of public record/public concern. Do not disclose confidential or private information.
  7. Strive to maintain an appropriate and respectful tone when engaging in online discussion. Even though you are not speaking on behalf of the organization, readers will likely associate you with it. The actions and words of even one employee may reflect on the reputation of the entire organization.
  8. Think before you post. Despite our best efforts, it is likely readers will associate personal accounts used to share extension-related content with ISU and ISU Extension and Outreach. Keep in mind that posts may be viewed by anyone, anywhere in the world, and material can be copied and forwarded. In addition, search engines may find posts years after their publication dates. Setting your account to private does not fully protect your posts from being discovered.
  9. Separating personal and professional time on social media will help maintain a professional focus and reduce the likelihood of errors.
  10. Avoid using acronyms of program names when talking about Iowa State University Extension and Outreach. Never use ISUEO when talking about Iowa State University Extension and Outreach. If you must shorten due to character count limitations, please use ISU Extension and Outreach. Ampersand (“&”) should never be used in place of the “and.”
  11. Think twice before posting a photograph or identifiable information about any participant of an Iowa State University Extension and Outreach event. Do you have written consent from the individual or a guardian to share? Posting

photographs that include minors, even if you believe them to be unidentifiable, should be done with caution and only with the consent of a guardian.

12. Posts that contain true threats, incitements to imminent lawless action, solicitations to commit crimes, fighting words, libel, and other unlawful conduct, are not protected speech.
13. Faculty, staff, and volunteers should employ the highest professional and ethical standards in any social media interactions with participants or partners of Iowa State University Extension and Outreach.

**V. Social Media Listening/Strategic Feedback**

Social media listening involves identifying and assessing what is being said online about a company, individual, product, or brand. Iowa State University Extension and Outreach conducts social media listening on applicable accounts – both personal staff accounts and Iowa State University Extension and Outreach-sanctioned accounts – to safeguard against communications that may violate university policy(ies). University employees may be held responsible for policy violations.

**VI. Dissemination**

These best practices will be disseminated by leadership to all county and state staff, councils, contractors, and volunteers. These best practices will also be reviewed during new staff orientation.

This document and best practices shall not be construed to impair any constitutionally protected activity including speech, protest, or assembly.