



The Social Media Navigator

GSA's Guide to Official Use of Social Media

September 2012

Change Log for Annual Update				
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#1	27 August 2012	Monica Fitzgerald, Office of the Chief Information Officer	Addition of <u>GSA's IT Rules of Behavior</u> to Introduction.	4
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1: Introduction – Guidance for the Official Use of Social Media

At GSA, our leadership, as highlighted in our [Social Media Policy](#), encourages the use of appropriate social media technologies to enhance communication, collaboration, and information exchange in support of our mission. This guide augments that policy and [GSA's IT Rules of Behavior](#). The scope of this guide includes social media technologies hosted on internal Federal Government servers, as well as those hosted outside of Federal Government servers. It includes our responsibilities when accessing social media services in either environment—in an official capacity.

These responsibilities apply to employees representing GSA online in official capacities, and to contractors working on behalf of GSA. The information in this guide does not supersede or replace existing legal responsibilities and policies in effect, and does not apply to your personal online activities while not on official duty; however, we are always bound by the Standards of Ethical Conduct for Employees of the Executive Branch, the conflict of interest statutes, and the Hatch Act. There are ethical obligations to follow even when we are engaged in our personal capacities as we will review in this guide.

2: What is Social Media?



- Web-based, interactive tools
- An easy way to reach a wide audience through sharing
- Great for creating two-way conversations and collaboration

Types of Social Media (From GSA managed site: www.howto.gov/social-media)

- [Blogs](#)
- [Social Networks](#)
- [Microblogs \(Twitter, etc.\)](#)
- [Wikis](#)
- [Video](#)
- [Podcasting](#)
- [Discussion Forums](#)
- [RSS](#)
- [Social Media Releases](#)
- [Photo Sharing](#)
- [Employee Ideation Programs](#)

One of GSA's missions is to provide citizens, customers, and partners with easy access to Government information and services. Social media isn't just where content is discovered, but where it is shared. Within GSA, there are various ways you can participate in and become more familiar with social media including:

- [GSA's Social Media Center](#) – A digital town hall where you, as a GSA employee can discover and discuss how to effectively use social media.
- [GSA's Online University](#) – GSA employees are encouraged to take a Social Media Awareness course and an Ethics & Social Media course.
- [Salesforce Chatter](#) – An internal platform for GSA employees where you can engage in conversations and join groups related to social media.
- [GSA's Social Media Directory](#) – A place on where anyone can learn about GSA's Social Media sites and initiatives. A great way to stay updated on the latest news pertaining to social media.
- [GSA's Center for Excellence in Digital Government](#) – GSA's program that works government-wide to help all agencies strengthen their social media practices.
- [Social Media Account Verification Tool](#) – At this GSA-managed social media registry (available in English and Spanish), anyone can confirm the validity of a variety of government social media accounts.

3: What “Official Use” Means

According to the Office of Ethics, you have two personas: an "official" you and a "personal" you. The "official you" represents and speaks on behalf of GSA. The personal you represents your own views and opinions. The difference between official use and personal use of social media is this:

- **Personal use:** You can do anything that's not illegal.
- **Official Use:** You can only do what you are authorized to do.

This Social Media Navigator provides guidance on using social media tools in an official capacity. So, let's talk about the "official" you: in other words, when you are communicating in your official capacity using social media. These types of communications may typically occur in two areas:

- Communication on GSA's official sites (e.g., our YouTube, Facebook or Twitter accounts).
- Communication on someone else's site (e.g., responding to a posting on another web site).

What “Official Capacity” Means

You know you are communicating in your official capacity when your supervisor assigns this activity as part of your official duties. Your supervisor should clearly explain the assignment and what social media tool or tools you can use. This is different from your “personal” use. The important point is that when you communicate in an official capacity you are communicating on behalf of GSA, just as if you were standing at a podium at a conference, communicating the agency's views to everyone.

What “Personal Use” Means

Personal use means you use social media to represent your own views and opinions. Obviously, you're allowed to have personal websites, Facebook accounts, blogs and the like outside of work. However, it's important to remember that when you use your social media tools personally, you're not speaking for GSA, and it shouldn't appear to others as though you're speaking for GSA. Remember, even in your

personal capacity, your use of social media may still be subject to the Hatch Act. If you have any questions, check with the [Office of Special Counsel](#) to ensure your use of social media on personal time is still in line.

4: Considerations When Choosing a Social Media Product

1. Think about your target audience and your goals for using social media.
2. Learn more about how your intended audience currently uses social media so you can “find them where they are”.
3. Research how others have used social media successfully for similar programs.
4. Begin to take the steps outlined below to fulfill your responsibilities.

5: Your Responsibilities

1. If you determine that using a social media tool is the way to go, first, get permission from the person in your Service or Staff Office who has the authority to allow it. Notify the Social Media Team in the Office of Communications and Marketing (OCM) at socialmedia@gsa.gov so they can help you with your planning and for their tracking purposes.
2. Clearly define the subject matter that will be the focus of your blog or other tool. Think about the kind of metrics that you'll want to use to measure whether your outreach is effective (e.g., posts per week, comments per post, etc.); and define how, if at all, your work will relate to other social media channels that already exist at the Agency.
3. Select your tool. If it is an external site like Facebook or YouTube, for example, find the “Terms of Service Agreement” on [apps.gov](#) and proceed. OCM can assist you in this step and help you learn about technologies to manage and monitor our social media traffic.
4. To ensure your use of social media is safe and effective, read [GSA's IT Rules of Behavior](#) and Appendix E in this Navigator Guide about "Risks and Mitigation Strategies.
5. Avoid accepting the standard "click-through" user agreement on most websites, as they contain provisions that the federal government cannot legally accept. You can check the Office of Management and Budget [Memorandum M-05-04](#) to see when information must be on a dot-gov, dot-mil, or fed.us website.

Get Approval and Notify the Office of Communications and Marketing

After you have your supervisor's approval, it is your responsibility to get approval from whoever in your organization has executive oversight or responsibility for the subject matter that will be the main focus of your social media effort. Inform GSA's Office of Communications and Marketing at socialmedia@gsa.gov, so that the Social Media Team can maintain an updated list of GSA's social media presences.

Minimize Your Risk

Social media tools and technologies such as Facebook, YouTube and Twitter, offer you powerful channels to deliver targeted marketing and outreach messages when, where and how users want information. The use of social media for federal services and interactions is growing tremendously, supported by initiatives from the administration, directives from government leaders, and demands from

the public. It is your responsibility to read and apply [GSA's IT Rules of Behavior](#) and read Appendix E, "Risks and Mitigation Strategies," which provides recommendations and a checklist to protect our network security.

Nonpublic Information

Various laws and regulations may prohibit the disclosure of certain information. [The Privacy Act](#), [Procurement Integrity Act](#), [Freedom of Information Act](#), [National Defense Authorization Act of 2012](#), and [Executive Order 13526](#) limit what can be shared with unauthorized individuals. These laws and order, for example, prohibit disclosure of certain privacy related information, source selection information, contractor proposal information, and classified information. You should not disclose nonpublic information through social media activities. In addition, the [Standards of Ethical Conduct for Employees of the Executive Branch](#) says you shouldn't use nonpublic information to further your or anyone else's private interest, whether through advice or recommendation, or by knowing about an unauthorized disclosure. Nonpublic information is information you receive because of your federal employment that you know, or reasonably should know, has not been made available to the general public.

Some examples of nonpublic information are:

- information covered under the Privacy Act;
- classified information;
- proprietary information from private-sector vendors or contractors;
- information designated as exempt under FOIA;
- source selection information on contracts or grants; and
- confidential business information as defined by federal law.

Remember, what is true on the phone, snail mail or email is equally true using social media. If it's not public information, it should not appear on GSA's social media sites.

About Endorsements of Products, Services, or Businesses

You cannot use your government position, title, or any authority associated with your public office to endorse any product, service or business. This restriction applies whether you use social media in your official capacity or for personal use. The use of GSA social media accounts and tools in an official capacity is part of the authority associated with your public office. For example, if you're using social media in your official capacity, you can't post a statement saying "GSA should negotiate a terms of service agreement with Twitter because Twitter is the best platform for public communication." This statement endorses Twitter by stating that Twitter is the "best" platform for communication. However, if you're using social media in your official capacity, you could post a statement such as "GSA just negotiated a terms of service agreement with Twitter, which will provide GSA with a platform to communicate with the public." This is a statement of fact versus an opinion and an endorsement. Avoid endorsing or appearing to endorse any private interests or nonfederal groups.

Section 508 Standards (Accessibility)

[Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973](#), requires that electronic and information technologies purchased, maintained, or used by the federal government meet certain accessibility standards. That means making Web-based content accessible for people with disabilities so they have access to the same information as everyone else. These standards are designed to make online information and services fully available to the 54 million Americans who have disabilities. Agencies are already required by the Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR) to modify acquisition planning procedures to ensure that the Section 508 standards are properly considered and to include the standards in requirements documents. OMB reminds agencies to disseminate information to the public on a timely and equitable basis. Agencies



employing nonfederal social media services still must ensure that people with disabilities have equal access to those services. You can use this [handy checklist](#) to ensure the accessibility of your content, particularly captioning videos. Contact your [GSA Section 508 coordinator](#) if you have questions or complaints.

Resources: [Section508.gov](#), [OMB Memo M-06-02](#), [Section508 Standards](#), [FAR](#)

Practice Proper Records Management

When you use electronic media, whether it's a blog, a website, a wiki, email or any other type of electronic communication, know that the regulations that govern proper management, archival and release of records still apply. The National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) offers resources and guidance to agencies to ensure proper records management. Contact records@gsa.gov for questions about records management at GSA. You can also take records management training designed by NARA on [GSA's Online University](#).

Resources:

- NARA Bulletin 2011-02, [Guidance on Managing Records in Web 2.0/Social Media Platforms](#)
- NARA regulations and guidance, including [Implications of Recent Web Technologies for NARA Web Guidance](#)
- NARA Bulletin 2010-05, [Guidance on Managing Records in Cloud Computing Environments](#)
- [OMB Circular A-130](#)
- [GSA's Online University](#)

Know the Laws for Information Collection

Agencies must, when practicable, use electronic forms and filing to conduct official business with the public, and social media technologies can be used in many cases to meet this need. Federal public websites must ensure information collected from the public minimizes burden and maximizes public utility. The Paperwork Reduction Act covers the collection of data from the public; it requires OMB approval of all surveys given to 10 or more participants. This includes any sort of survey where identical questions are given to ten or more participants, regardless of the format. The exception to the survey rule is an anonymous submission form where users can provide open-ended comments or suggestions without any sort of government guidance on the content. The Children's Online Privacy Protection Act also has rules about communication and collection of data from people younger than 13. If you have questions about these acts, contact GSA's Office of General Counsel.

OMB has approved the use of a use a [fast-track process](#) by agencies for some information collection which can be useful for social media related surveys and questionnaires. Contact GSA's Privacy Act Officer to learn more. Consider using the fast-track process for your data collection activities when:

- The data collection is focused on improving existing or future services, products, or communication materials;
- The data collection is voluntary;
- A statistical rigor is not required;
- The burden on participants is not high; and
- Public dissemination of results is not intended.

Resources:

- [Government Paperwork Elimination Act](#)
- [Paperwork Reduction Act](#)
- [Children's Online Privacy Protection Act](#)

- [2010 OMB Memo on Social Media, Interactive Technologies and the Paperwork Reduction Act](#)
- [GSA's Office of General Counsel](#)
- [GSA's Privacy Act Officer](#)
- [Fast-Track Process](#)

Plain Language

The Plain Writing Act of 2010 requires the federal government to write all new publications, forms, and publicly distributed documents in a "clear, concise, well-organized" manner. Visit www.plainlanguage.gov for examples of plain language and information on free training. Communicating in plain language means the audience can quickly and easily find what they need, understand what they find and act appropriately on that understanding.

Meet Information Quality Standards

The public places a high degree of trust in dot-gov content and considers it an authoritative source. Under the [Information Quality Act](#), agencies must maximize the quality, objectivity, utility, and integrity of information and services provided to the public. With social media information dissemination products, agencies must reasonably ensure suitable information and service quality consistent with the level of importance of the information. Reasonable steps include: clearly identifying the benefits and limitations inherent in the information dissemination product (e.g., possibility of errors, degree of reliability, and validity); and taking reasonable steps to remove the limitations inherent in the product or information produced. Agency management should ensure that the agency position, rather than one person's opinion, is reflected in all communications.

Ensure Meaningful Access by People with Limited English Proficiency

Executive Order 13166 requires that people with limited English proficiency have meaningful access to an agency's federally conducted programs and activities in order to prevent national origin discrimination. The use of social media technologies to communicate and collaborate with citizens is a federally conducted activity. To ensure meaningful access by people with limited English proficiency, an agency must conduct an assessment that balances several factors including the number or proportion of eligible people with limited English proficiency, the frequency of contact, the nature and importance of the program or activity, and the availability of resources. Based on this four-factor analysis, an organization must develop and implement a limited English proficiency plan, if necessary.

Resources: [GSA's Office of Civil Rights Library](#), [DPJ's Limited English Proficiency Program](#)

Protect Intellectual Property

The use and management of social media technologies raises several questions about the legal concepts of copyright, fair use and intellectual property ownership. Agencies should be diligent to ensure they consider existing intellectual property and copyright laws when implementing social media technologies. While the federal government typically provides public data that are not considered copyrightable intellectual property, social media technologies that allow public contribution of content may create challenges about the protection of intellectual property contributed by visitors. Agencies must post clear disclaimers detailing the copyrights that nongovernment contributors may retain. Government content can sometimes belong to the public domain and be free from copyright, but this is not always true, especially when images and trademarked names or logos are concerned. Thus, this content cannot automatically be assumed to be free of intellectual property rights and available for any individual or site provider wishing to use it. Social media can make it easy to violate another's rights, so you need to ensure you don't infringe on another's protected rights. Also, you should post clear disclaimers detailing liability if a member of the public's post violates another's intellectual property or copyright. Please note that the GSA



star mark is registered with the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office, and the GSA seal is protected by statute. Contact the Office of General Counsel with specific questions.

Resources:

- Copyright.gov
- U.S. Trademark and Patent Office
- GSA's Office of General Counsel
- Guidance on Using GSA's Branding Images

Privacy Considerations

The government requires public-facing websites to conduct privacy impact assessments if they collect personally identifiable information. They should post a "Privacy Act Statement" that describes the agency's legal authority for collecting personal data and how the data will be used. Privacy policies on each website also must be in a standardized machine-readable format such as the Platform for Privacy Preferences Project, or P3P. Information on Web 2.0 platforms is accessible by others, so don't disclose information protected by the Privacy Act or other personally identifiable information unless you're authorized to do so in that medium.

Resource: GSA's Privacy Program

Cookies

Many social media tools use "persistent cookie" technology. A persistent cookie is a small text file that a website places on a visitor's computer so that it can remember the visitor when they show up again later. In general, websites use cookies for things like a "Remember Me" checkbox that lets you quickly log into a website, or to get metrics on site usage to understand how people are using the site. The most recent guidance from OMB on the use of persistent cookies by Federal agencies is OMB Memorandum-10-22. It differentiates between "Tier 1" and "Tier 2" cookies, which do not collect users' personal information, and "Tier 3" cookies, which do, and thus require a more extensive review and public comment process. Another resource is OMB Memorandum-10-23 which provides guidance for Agency Use of Third-Party Websites and Applications.

Provide Data in a Usable Format

Many social media technologies allow users to take data from one website and combine it with data from another, commonly referred to as "mashups." Agency public websites are required to provide most data in an open, industry standard format that permits users to use data to meet their needs. Agencies should ensure these open industry standard formats are followed to maximize use of their data. The Digital Government Strategy initiated in 2012 encourages all agencies to make their information more usable than in the past which helps in the development of applications and also to improve mobile technologies.

Resources: OMB Memorandum M-05-04, Digital Government Strategy, Data.gov

Adhere to Lobbying Rules

The U.S. Code prohibits the use of appropriated funds to lobby a member of Congress. You can't use these funds "... directly or indirectly to pay for any personal service, advertisement, telegram, telephone, letter, printed or written matter, or other device, intended or designed to influence in any manner a Member of Congress, a jurisdiction, or an official of any government to favor, adopt, or oppose, by vote or otherwise, any legislation, law, ratification, policy, or appropriation, whether before or after the introduction of any bill, measure, or resolution proposing such legislation, law, ratification, policy, or appropriation. ..." Appropriated funds can extend to pay for employees salaries, equipment, office space,



and so forth. These restrictions also apply to social media. Refer any questions to GSA's Office of General Counsel.

Resource: [OMB Policies for Federal Public Websites](#), [GSA's Office of General Counsel](#)

Avoid Political Activity (Hatch Act)

Even though social media are widely used in politics, the general rules that apply to government communications haven't changed. Avoid any topics that may violate the Hatch Act, which prohibits you from being politically active while on duty, at work, in uniform or in a government vehicle. Political activity is any activity directed toward the success or failure of a political party, candidate for partisan political office, or partisan political group. In addition, you may not use your official title while participating in political activity, use your authority to coerce any person to participate in political activity, or solicit or receive political contributions. The same rules apply to using social media to engage in political activity while you're on duty.

Resources: [Hatch Act – Office of Special Counsel](#), [GSA's Office of General Counsel](#)

Know When the Federal Advisory Committee Act Applies

Since many social media technologies excel at enabling information-sharing across the Internet, government programs may use them to share ideas on current and future plans, to gather opinions about a variety of issues and to strengthen the relationship between the public and government. Depending on circumstances (such as targeting specific experts for an online discussion of proposed policy), some of these efforts may meet the functional definition of a virtual or electronic advisory group. Those would fall under the purview of the Federal Advisory Committee Act. An advisory group meeting held in virtual space instead of office space, isn't exempt from the government's rules on such activities.

The Federal Advisory Committee Act applies when:

- A federal agency establishes or uses an advisory group has at least one member who is not a federal employee; and
- The government is managing and controlling the group in any way, such as selecting members, setting an agenda or consolidating results generated by the group of participants.

The Federal Advisory Committee Act does not apply when:

- Government agencies seek input and suggestions from the general public on various issues.

To find out if a group comes under the Federal Advisory Committee Act, contact the sponsoring agency's committee management officer, or the GSA committee management secretariat at cms@gsa.gov.

Resource: [Federal Advisory Committee Act](#)

Monitor What You Control

As a social media user, you're responsible for continually checking the pages you own. The person (or designee) who has responsibility for approving the page, should ensure the information is accurate, timely, relevant and complete; and does not adversely affect the execution of GSA's or the federal government's missions and responsibilities. Your responsibilities include inactivating the page if the owner leaves the agency and notifying the Office of the Chief Information Officer that the page has been transferred to someone else. If you have questions, send them to socialmedia@gsa.gov.

6: GSA Encourages and Supports Social Media

To further support social media within the Agency, we have a Social Media Working Group, co-chaired by the Office of the Chief Information Officer and the Office of Communications and Marketing, which is comprised of GSA employees with leadership roles in social media, technology, communications, legal issues and policy. Its mission is to support, encourage and promote the informed use of social media to help GSA become more transparent, participatory and innovative as the agency strives to fulfill its mission of service to our customer agencies and the American people. This group identifies issues, training needs and it recommends updates to social media guidance. For more information or to get involved contact socialmedia@gsa.gov.

7: Social Media Use Should Be Strategic

Whether you use Apps.gov or commercial sites such as Facebook and Twitter, social media tools present opportunities for supplementing how we reach our target audiences, such as citizens. These tools should never replace official communication channels, such as gsa.gov, for disseminating information. Because these sites evolve at a rapid pace, how to best incorporate them will need to be tailored to your organization's needs, its business strategy and its overall communications strategy. Remember, agencies must ensure government information is available and accessible to people without Internet connectivity, so you must provide members of the public who don't have Internet connectivity with timely and equitable access to information. This might mean providing hard copies of reports and forms.

Before you start using social media tools such as Twitter, Facebook or YouTube, think strategically and keep these things in mind:

1. Be sure to work with the Office of Communication's Social Media Team (reached at socialmedia@gsa.gov) when starting new social media initiatives.
2. GSA's social media policy applies to any message written in your official capacity or when communicating about our business and mission.
3. Apps.gov provides a host of free third-party tools that have amended "fed-friendly" terms of service agreements. These tools don't necessarily comply with federal accessibility, privacy or security laws out of the box, so it's your responsibility to ensure that they are used in a compliant way.
4. HowTo.gov hosted by GSA, provides federal employees a fast and easy way to create a blogs and use other tools. The tools, including a WordPress blogging platform, comply with all current federal policies on privacy, security, accessibility and others.

8: GSA Has the Right to Monitor and Remove Comments

GSA recognizes First Amendment rights and will allow various comments, viewpoints and opinions. In fact, social media usage is designed to solicit that input. However, the agency can monitor and remove comments that are political, target specific individuals or groups, are commercial in nature, are abusive or are similarly unacceptable. Contact the [GSA's Office of General Counsel](#) as situations arise that may require the monitoring or removal of comments posted on or to a GSA social media presence.



9: This Guide Will Continue to Be Reviewed

The Offices of the Chief Information Officer, General Counsel, Government-wide Policy, and Citizen Services and Innovative Technologies will review this guide at least every calendar year. The review will be to incorporate changes in available technologies and relevant practices and policies.

APPENDIX:

A. Requirements Checklist When Using Social Media

This is a quick reference to help you make sure you're doing everything right when you are using social media tools in your official capacity as a GSA employee.

Have I...? (Yes/No)	Action
	read and understand GSA's IT Rules of behavior?
	minimized my risks by reviewing Appendix E on IT security?
	let the Office of Communications and Marketing know about my social media presence by contacting them at socialmedia@gsa.gov ?
	made sure that my social media is accessible to people with disabilities by following Section 580 accessibility rules?
	planned for records management?
	paid attention to copyrights and other intellectual property?
	complied with all privacy protections requirements?
	avoided political activity and adhere to lobbying rules?
	made sure that my data is in a usable industry standard format?
	found out whether the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA) applies?
	checked into whether I need to get OMB approval for certain kinds of surveys due to the Paperwork Reduction Act?
	made sure that my communications reflects the agency's position rather than just one person's opinion?
	written my content in plain language?
	have someone review my content to make sure that I was being objective and trustworthy?
	ensured meaningful access to people with limited English proficiency if applicable?
	followed a plan for monitoring my social media content regularly?

B. Advice for Engaging in Online Conversations

Engage Regularly and Respond Quickly

In social media, conversations take place over minutes or hours, not weeks or months. If you decide to engage in conversation using social media, be sure you can respond quickly and with all the facts. Even if your reaction is “we can’t provide an answer yet,” providing some response quickly is part of the excellent customer service everyone should receive when talking to you. If you host a blog, be sure you dedicate resources to provide new content regularly.

Ask for Input When You Need It

It’s great to involve citizens in the governing process by asking for ideas or input. Before you do, make sure you’re asking about an issue you can actually respond. For example, you may want to ask whether your visitors would find a new website feature helpful, but you would avoid asking whether another agency’s website should be redesigned. The public expects us to operate government effectively, and part of doing that is asking for feedback when appropriate.

Be Transparent

It’s great to share as much useful information as you reasonably can, so that citizens understand what their government is doing and why. However, every day, we’re trusted with information that isn’t appropriate for sharing with the public, such as the status of an ongoing procurement or negotiations over a building lease. If you’re unsure whether something can be shared, talk to your supervisor, security manager or send your question to socialmedia@gsa.gov.

Engage for Accuracy, not Argument

Because of the many important issues GSA handles, there’s a lot of conversation about us online. For example, head to Twitter.com and search for “General Services Administration” to see what people are saying about us right now. If you see misrepresentations made about us in social media, you can certainly use your social media site or someone else’s to point out the error and provide correct facts. Make sure your position is factual, and your tone is not disparaging or argumentative.

Admit Mistakes Quickly

Part of honestly engaging with citizens is admitting when you’ve made an error. If you make an error, be upfront and correct it quickly. If you choose to modify something you said earlier, make clear what you’re modifying, and make it clear that you’ve done so (for example, by using ~~strikethru~~ strikethrough text). Nobody expects you to never make a mistake, but we do expect you to be honest about it.

Remember This Rule of Thumb

Say to citizens on social media only what you would say on the phone or in other official communications. There are always consequences to what you write. If you’re unsure about something, discuss your proposed post with your supervisor.

C. Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Can I use social media tools (both GSA-sponsored and third-party sites such as Facebook and Twitter) for my job?

A: Yes, you may use both GSA-sponsored and third-party sites to help get the agency's message out. Keep in mind the rules governing official GSA communications, such as the Standards of Ethical Conduct for Employees of the Executive Branch. Also, use caution to avoid accepting the standard "click-through" user agreement on most websites; they contain provisions that the government cannot legally accept. Appendix E provides guidance on risks and mitigation strategies.

Q: Does GSA's Social Media Policy require offices to use social media tools?

A: No. The policy simply encourages the use of social media technologies to enhance communication, collaboration and information exchange in support of our mission.

Q: As part of my official responsibilities, I manage my office's blog. What can't I talk about on the blog?

A: Your office's efforts with social media should always be related to GSA's mission, so you should always keep your message strategic and focused. Follow the same rules using your office's blog that you use with any other communication tools (telephone, Internet, etc.). These rules cover endorsements, appropriate language, political statements and other topics. See Appendix D "Guidance for Bloggers."

Q: As part of my official duties, I am responsible for maintaining one of my office's Facebook pages. Are there any Facebook-specific rules I need to be aware of?

A: No. There are no new rules to follow as a result of using Facebook or other social media tools. The guidelines for appropriate use of social media already exist in rules that apply to official communication.

Q: A Web service such as Twitter isn't compliant with Section 508, but GSA offices use it to communicate. Why is that allowed?

A: All information that a Federal Agency sends out via a 3rd party social media tool must also reside on the Agency website. Commercial tools are opportunities for supplementing how we reach our target audiences. They should not, however, replace official communication channels. Our offices using Twitter make the information in their posts available through official channels that meet all legal requirements. Generally speaking, as long as there's equal access to the information for people with and without disabilities, and commercial sites are not the only or official source of GSA information, our offices can communicate using sites such as Twitter or Facebook.

Q: Is GSA's Social Media Navigator a step toward limiting what employees can say on the agency's Facebook, YouTube and Twitter pages in their official capacity?

A: No. The Navigator provides guidance on how to use social media tools, such as Facebook, YouTube and Twitter, in carrying out our mission while still complying with rules and regulations. Social media is just another communications tool. When speaking in your official capacity, you must follow the same rules whether you communicate through social media, the telephone, gsa.gov or other medium.

Q: I want to set up an official blog, Facebook page or Twitter account for my office. Do I need permission, and whom should I ask?

A: You should speak to the person in your office that has executive oversight or responsibility for the subject you'll be communicating about. Also, remember you must contact the Office of Communications



and Marketing at socialmedia@gsa.gov, so staff can maintain assist you and maintain an updated list of our social media initiatives.

Q: I must admit I don't know much about Facebook or Twitter, and wondered if you have any really specific guidance on using them?

A: As a matter of fact, the people on the Social Media Team in the Office of Communications and Marketing have been answering questions just like yours when they receive emails at socialmedia@gsa.gov. They've created two very helpful handouts — one for using Twitter and the other for Facebook. Check them out here:

[Guidance for Twitter Accounts](#)

[Guidance for Facebook Accounts](#)



D. Guidance for Bloggers

Properly Request a Blog

All GSA blogs must be requested by contacting the Office of Communication's Social Media Team at socialmedia@gsa.gov. They will help you strategize, get necessary permissions and ensure that your blog has a link to our mandatory [Blog Posting Requirements and Disclaimers](#).

Let People Know Who You Are

Blogs succeed when visitors feel they have reached a trusted source of information. Let readers know who the blogger is from a professional standpoint. But do not release personal information that the general public shouldn't know, for example a home address or phone number.

Post Often

Be prepared to post content on a regular basis. This may mean daily or weekly, but at least every two weeks. Let readers know what the posting schedule is. Be realistic in preparing a schedule. It's always better to increase frequency over the life of a blog. If a blog remains idle for 60 days or more, GSA reserves the right to take it offline.

Be Attentive

Be prepared to make time and devote resources to moderating all comments that readers post. Read every comment. If you need time to research responses, tell your audience the time frame they can expect to receive your response.

Engage Colleagues

Invite guest contributors. This is a great way to enhance value without increasing workload. Announce who the guest contributors will be.

Be Open

Be prepared to respond on the blog to the posted comments, especially negative ones. Blogs build credibility and readership when they're as open as possible.

Strategize About How to Handle Frequent Questions

If the same questions are posed repeatedly, consider creating boilerplate responses to the questions.

Be Creative

Be aware that there are a variety of ways people will find the blog (via search engines, search and other email alerts, RSS feeds, various social networking sites, bookmarking sites, and email from another person). This means individuals will often read only a headline (or title), or a headline and a couple of sentences. The more intriguing and relevant the headline of the blog and the content that follows, the more likely the content is to build readership.

E. Risks and Mitigation Strategies

Social media sites are not, for the most part, any more or less insecure than other types of Web applications. Many sites are operated by third parties (e.g., Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter) and may be prone to security vulnerabilities. Since the social media technologies we use for public-facing interaction of outreach and marketing, the Federal Information Security Management Act or similar security risk assessments and standards don't apply. Guidance is available through the senior agency security officer in the Office of the Chief Information Officer at itsecurity@gsa.gov.

To ensure our use of social media is safe and effective, this document provides guidelines and recommendations for mitigating security risks posed by social media tools and protecting our network. Because this landscape is constantly shifting, these recommendations and risks are only as good as the latest draft and should not be considered exhaustive or comprehensive. As we learn more from our experiences and yours, we'll regularly update this document to reflect the best practices to secure our network and still uphold GSA's mission.

1. Types of Risks:

Social media technologies such as wikis, blogs and social networks are vulnerable to three types of cyber attacks: spear phishing, social engineering, and Web application attacks.

- **Spear phishing** is an attack targeting a user or group of users to get the user to do something that launches an attack. For example, the user may open a document or click a link that then launches an attack. Spear phishers rely on knowing your personal information, such as an event, interest, travel plans, or current issues. If you use social media be careful in clicking links and communicating with other members of online groups.
- **Social engineering** relies on exploiting the human element of trust. The first step in any social engineering attack is to collect information about the attacker's target. Social networking websites can reveal a large amount of personal information, including resumes, home addresses, phone numbers, employment information, work locations, family members, education and photos. Social media websites may share more personal information than users expect or need to keep in touch.
- **Web application attacks** are dynamic Web pages that use scripting to provide additional functionality to the user. Social media websites are advanced Web applications, and this opens them up to vulnerabilities exploitable by attackers. Advances in Web application technologies allow attackers to use new techniques against social media websites not previously possible in email. For example, emerging techniques include using custom Facebook applications to target users. Facebook applications are written by third-party developers and often have minimal security controls.

2. Strategies for Minimizing Risk

The risks previously outlined are serious, but they shouldn't be a reason or an excuse not to use social media. While launching an attack is technically complex, all you need to avoid them is a little bit of knowledge and common sense. Here are some strategies you can use to minimize risk and use social media safely.

- **Procedural Controls.** The most important question to ensure your safe use of social media tools is not "what tools do we use?" but "how do we use them?" Be explicit about the type of data or

information you'll share. Who's authorized to post content? Who's authorized to approve it? Prepare a brief document that captures your goals and objectives for using social media and what types of interactions you are or are not seeking to engage in. Create operating procedures to filter content, address who will be the administrator and what you expect of users. Include specific activities or traffic that aren't allowed, such as the addition of third-party applications.

- **Acquisition Controls.** Most social media services provide administrative features that can customize how information is collected from and provided to the public, either bundled with the service or for an additional fee. A great example of this is GSA's own terms of service agreements with social media providers (see the "Social Media Apps" section of apps.gov.) Many agreements include negotiated terms for IT security. Consider comparing the feature sets of platforms side by side, or engaging vendors to inquire about the security and privacy features they provide. Consider whether platforms that use voting or public comment are prone to being "gamed" or invite cheating or fraud, and what measures can be taken to prevent it.
- **Training Controls.** The key to using social media securely is ensuring that everyone who uses it has access to sufficient training materials and opportunities. Even for social media initiatives that aren't new, providing periodic awareness and training can help educate users about what information to share and with whom they can share it. Employees should also be trained to protect GSA and themselves by not blurring personal and professional lives, and with additional guidance concerning if and how they should identify themselves on social media websites, depending on their official role. The Office of the Chief Information Officer also operates a number of network controls and host controls to safeguard GSA's information and networks.

A sample risk mitigation checklist may be useful. (These guidelines are adapted from the Federal CIO Council's document, "Guidelines for Secure Use of Social Media,") This list is abbreviated; you should consult the original document for more complete guidance.)

Sample Social Media Risk Mitigation Checklist

Do I have...? (Yes/No)	Action
	a content disclaimer and site ownership disclaimer?
	a plan for regular content updating and content review?
	a blog comment moderation policy?
	a plan for security vulnerability checks, and is staff assigned the review?
	a written incident response plan that has been vetted and approved?
	a plan for regular review of things like profile pages, links, photographs and my online vulnerability reports?

F. How Agencies are Using Social Media

Social media lets anyone you talk to talk back to you just as easily. For government, this presents some challenges and enormous opportunities. There's always room to improve how we deliver information and partner with stakeholders. Social media lets them tell us — quickly and vocally — what we're doing wrong and how we could be doing better. The feedback you get from social media can provide incredible insight into what our customers want and how we can deliver it. Many social media sites offer search functions that you can use to stay ahead of the curve and anticipate citizens' ideas and needs. Here are a few of the hundreds of examples of agencies using social media to perform their mission and achieve great results:

- **[Library of Congress on Flickr](#)** — The Library of Congress uses social media to deliver content in ways that the public expects and appreciates and to enlist the public in the critical mission of examining and cataloguing that content for future generations. In January 2008, the Library of Congress used the popular photo-sharing service Flickr (www.flickr.com) to put thousands of public-domain, copyright-free photos online so everyone could share and explore them. It also used Flickr's social tagging features to let the public sort the photos by person, place, topic and other key dimensions.
- **[National Library of Medicine's Pillbox](#)** — Pillbox is a Web application created by the National Library of Medicine that lets visitors rapidly identify an unknown pill by describing its shape, color and markings, and searching against government data for a match. Pillbox is an example of how the Internet can transform previously hard-to-access government data into vital information at your fingertips.
- **[The TSA Blog](#)** — Blogging has represented a major shift in how we share and discuss information in real time. In January 2008, the Transportation Security Administration recognized the potential value of this shift by launching a blog to provide "a forum for a lively, open discussion of TSA issues." Since then, TSA has received thousands of posts and comments, and has become a model of how federal government can use blogs to engage authentically with the public. The blog has also been used to provide travel tips and clarify controversial incidents involving airport security, all the while building TSA's reputation for engaging in an honest and straightforward way with the public.
- **[Challenge.gov](#)** — Government agencies post challenges on this GSA managed site and the public can post submissions to these challenges. A challenge is exactly what the name suggests: it is a challenge by one party (a "seeker") to a third party or parties (a "solver") to identify a solution to a particular problem or reward contestants for accomplishing a particular goal. Prizes (monetary or non-monetary) often accompany challenges and contests. Challenges can range from fairly simple (idea suggestions, creation of logos, videos, digital games and mobile applications) to proofs of concept, designs, or finished products that solve the grand challenges of the 21st century.
- **[Smithsonian's Use of Facebook](#)** — A team of fish specialists—ichthyologists--sponsored by the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History performed the first survey of the fish diversity in the Cuyuni River of Guyana in 2011. Upon their return, they needed to identify the more than 5,000 specimens they had collected in less than a week's time in order to obtain an export permit. Faced with insufficient time and inadequate library resources to tackle the problem on their own,



they instead posted a catalog of specimen images to Facebook and turned to their network of colleagues for help. In less than 24 hours, this approach identified approximately 90 percent of the posted specimens to at least the level of genus, revealed the presence of at least two likely undescribed species, indicated two new records for Guyana and generated several loan requests.

The next innovation on this list could easily be yours! If you have a great idea and are not sure about where to take it, contact socialmedia@gsa.gov to get the assistance you need.