UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
Agriculture and Natural Resources

Social Media Guidelines and Policies for Branded UC ANR Accounts

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INTRODUCTION

Social media plays a vital role for UC ANR in extending information, connecting with stakeholders and colleagues, reaching new audiences, engaging with media and advocacy. Social media also provides an important way for Extension professionals to "listen" to others, and engage in real-time conversations. Some UC ANR professionals use social media to identify new collaborations and conduct research. There is real value in social media engagement.

We strive to support the UC ANR community in representing themselves and our institution in the best possible light on social media, and in growing awareness of and engagement with our valuable programs and initiatives around the state. All members of the UC ANR community who participate in the online world in an official capacity should understand the impact of using these tools to communicate about the work and mission of UC ANR.

Leveraging social media effectively requires understanding your goals, having a strategy and dedicating time to be present in social spaces. As with any Extension outreach method, be prepared to measure your impacts.

Please keep the following guidelines, best practices and policies in mind when you participate in social media, and remember that **what you post online lasts forever**.

WHAT IS A BRANDED UC ANR ACCOUNT?

A social media account operated by UC ANR personnel or volunteers that is branded with the name of the division or one of its programs (4-H, UC Master Gardener, UCCE, etc.).

SET-UP REQUIREMENTS FOR UC ANR BRANDED ACCOUNTS

Register the site

Branded social media accounts must be registered with UC ANR Strategic Communications. Fill in the registration information [here](). All active accounts will be listed in the UC ANR social media directory that is downloadable from [this page](). If you use a [personal social media account]() as the hub of your professional/educational content, you may also sign up to be listed in the directory by emailing [Strategic Communications]().

Use proper branding
Be sure to follow [UC ANR Branding Guidelines](). Include a reference to "UC Agriculture and Natural Resources" in the About section description to make it clear that your account is in the UC ANR family of accounts. If you have questions about branding, contact [Strategic Communications]().

Example:
The University of California Cooperative Extension of the Central Sierra territory provides science-based information and educational programs to solve local issues in agriculture, natural resources, nutrition, and youth development -- improving social, economic and environmental quality for all residents.

UC Cooperative Extension is part of a statewide network of UC Agriculture and Natural Resources programs.

Site administration
Social media accounts for UC ANR entities, including 4-H, UC Master Gardener, UCCE or any other entity representing UC ANR, must be approved by a supervisor and **owned by a UC ANR employee** as the primary administrator, preferably with a second employee admin as backup. Each account should have a minimum of two administrators so that activity and access are not affected by personnel changes.

Failure to comply with the guidance for [branded social media accounts]() could result in termination of the account.

PLANNING

Before opening a UC ANR-branded account (including accounts for any of our sub-brands like 4-H, UC Master Gardener, etc.), consider these guiding questions. Your answers will form the basis of your [social media plan]() (addressing channel choices, target audiences, tone, featured topics, post frequency, etc.) Since social media takes time and depends on a thoughtful plan, it is important to have your supervisor on board with that use of your time. It might be helpful to view the Strategic Communications channel framework [on this page]() in developing your plan.

- What is the primary goal of this social media account? How will you measure those goals?
- Is this the right platform to reach your target audience? Research [audience demographics]() for each platform. Involve audience members in your planning, if possible. What kind of content do they like? When are they active on these platforms?
- What other marketing channels are you currently using and how are they working? How will social media be used differently?
- Who is going to manage the account? What happens if and when the selected admin(s) leaves the organization?
- What [content]() will you share, and what is your [plan]() to schedule and create this content?

- How often will the account be checked for feedback? Who will be charged with responding to feedback?
- Will you provide valuable content to users on a consistent basis? Daily posting is recommended on social media platforms. If it is not feasible to post original content daily, we recommend daily sharing of relevant content from others (with context provided) and a minimum of weekly posting of original content.
- How will you promote the account to gain a following?
- What is your social media plan for managing a crisis? Who needs to be notified in the event of a public relations emergency?
- How will you address inappropriate posts by your followers?
- Are there other UC ANR social media accounts that are already connecting with your target audience? Using established platforms might reach your target audience faster than it takes to build your own fan base. View the social media directory that is downloadable from this page to see what already exists and avoid duplicating efforts.
- How will you measure success? Establish performance metrics that are tied to your goals. Find out what posts did well, and why, and adapt accordingly. Typical social media metrics include number of followers, number of engagements with the content (retweets, shares, comments, likes, video views) and number of click-throughs to links you include in your posts. You should also analyze which types of images and types/lengths of videos perform best to inform your overall strategy (hint: animals always do well). There are numerous free resources available to help you measure success.
- View the social media information in the UC ANR communications toolkit for additional information and ideas.
- Read these platform-specific tips: https://sproutsocial.com/insights/social-media-tips/

CREATING AND POSTING CONTENT

When you use social media, it's important to observe general guidelines including accessibility and remember basic social media etiquette. Broadly speaking, there are three things you need to pay attention to in social media:
- How you conduct yourself
- How you interact with others
- The content you provide

Conduct and interaction

Most social media environments are intended to be communities of equals. An important element of your credibility is your ability to **communicate authentically** and respectfully as a member of the community.

A healthy civic life supports a **range of opinions**. On your professional accounts, you are free to discuss and disagree with others regarding topics relevant to the purpose of the social media platform, but don't use ethnic or racial slurs, hateful speech, personal attacks, abusive language, nudity or pornography. Avoid engaging with or commenting on inappropriate posts from others. Be mindful of the difference between positive and normative claims, both in your owns posts and in the posts you read.

Engage followers and fans with questions, dialogue, invitations to comment, and useful information. Avoid being too focused on self-promotion. Think of yourself as a good host; you want to keep conversations going and promote the exchange of information and ideas. If you're always selling and promoting yourself, people will stop engaging. Sharing specific impact stories about your clientele promotes your work in a more powerful way than posts that are merely self-congratulatory.

Monitor activity. Administrators for social media sites must be prepared to **monitor comments** and posts by others (including external visitors) for professionalism. At a minimum, site administrators should spend a couple of minutes at the beginning of each day monitoring social media activity. When someone posts a question, **answer it promptly** and publicly where others can see your response. Don't be discouraged if you don't receive responses to your questions initially. It may take time to build up some rapport with your followers.

If anyone posts something profane or inappropriate on your page, **delete it without comment**. Do not repost or retweet it, even to point out its errors. Doing so just spreads the negativity further and may even make it seem to have originated with you. If someone repeatedly posts inappropriate content, block that person from using the features available on the site. If you are unsure about whether a post "crosses the line," consult with UC ANR Risk and Safety Services and/or Strategic Communications. As stated elsewhere in this policy, UC ANR reserves the right to block or remove the content of any post that violates UC policies including the Principles of Community.

Here is guidance on how to block people on several specific platforms:
Facebook
Twitter
LinkedIn
Instagram
YouTube

Users will post comments that are critical of UC ANR or the University of California. You should not remove them from the page. To simply remove all dissent removes the social from social media. Rather, **respond** to them in the same way you would respond to a person who visits or calls your office with a complaint or criticism. Address the individual's concerns professionally and courteously. If users are critical of others in your comment stream, the same idea applies about not removing the comments because people are free to express their opinions. Reach out to the person(s) being criticized to make sure they are aware and encourage a response if appropriate.

Be aware that because of the University of California's status as a public entity, creation of any public discussion forum may invoke **free-speech issues**, thereby limiting your ability to edit the content of comments made by the public. Threatening or obscene comments may be deleted, as may spam, posts promoting illegal activities or copyright infringements. However, complaints about the university, its employees, its facilities or practices may not be deleted without approval from UC legal counsel. Contact Robin Sanchez for assistance. If you see a post that you think needs an official UC ANR response, contact Strategic Communications.

Get consent
If you plan to post photos or videos, or other identifying information about people, you are responsible for obtaining appropriate authorization and consent forms from all such persons in the materials, including clients, volunteers, employees, faculty, staff, students and visitors. *Never* **share identifying**

information about children that would enable a stranger to find them, such as their names or school locations, on public pages or posts to public pages. Social posts must never include sensitive financial or legal information, confidential information, or sensitive or personal medical information that would violate HIPPA regulations. Be sure to follow UC guidance on [intellectual property](#).

Avoid accidental posts. Because personal accounts are often tied to professional account administration, staff should be aware of the unfortunate possibility of making "accidental" posts or tweets to an official account rather than their own. Be sure to always check which account you are actively logged in to before every post or tweet.

Share content created by others. The guiding principle in sharing/retweeting content created by others is to verify that the content creators are trusted, reliable sources of information. Sharing information is a core activity on social media, stimulating conversation and engagement in the exchange of ideas, but it requires responsible curation of reliable information and good digital citizenship. If you are unsure about the reliability of the source of information, don't share it.

Trusted sources are usually academics, journalists, medical professionals, advocates or organizations that provide unbiased information. When sharing information on controversial topics, it's especially important to trust your source.

Provide context for why you think the information is worth sharing on behalf of UC ANR with your followers, rather than retweeting without a comment. The context can be something as simple as "Interesting take on this topic" or "Thought-provoking exploration of the issue." Providing context for potentially controversial information helps your followers not assume that by sharing the information you are endorsing or promoting it. Making more specific retweet comments can help followers better understand your intent.

Quality matters. Take time when posting to check grammar, spelling and the accuracy of what you're sharing. Some social media platforms — including Twitter — don't allow you to edit once you've posted. If you post something that is erroneous, correct your mistake as soon as possible. The best practice is to delete the post and repost the correct information with an apology. If you catch the error immediately, it is not necessary to apologize to your followers.

Provide content regularly. To use social media professionally, you need to participate with [consistency](#). If you don't have new content, consider posting a question that prompts others to participate and share information. But if you really do not have anything to say, do not post. If you find you are only posting once a week or less, social media may not be right for you/your unit.

Properly represent UC ANR. There are times when UC ANR representatives speaking for UC ANR will want to publish comments on others' blogs, channels or posts in order to correct misstatements of facts about UC ANR or its programs, or comment on issues that are reported in the press concerning the University or UC ANR. These types of posts should be made only by, or in consultation with, Strategic Communications or other key UC ANR communicators. All postings of this type should clearly identify the poster as an employee of UC ANR who is speaking on behalf of UC ANR. If an **emergency** is unfolding, please do not post speculative information about the situation on your site. For proper emergency communications response, please contact [Risk and Safety Services](#).

Counter cyber-security risks. Social networking is built upon mutual trust. Attackers seek to exploit this trust relationship to damage reputation, disrupt operations, or for financial gain. Their tactics include taking control of social media sites and posting links to websites controlled by them to distribute malware or exploit vulnerabilities in web browsers, web browser extensions or applications. Change your passwords often. Avoid re-using passphrases for other sites, and where available use two-factor authentication. Hover over links and look at where they go before clicking on them. Stay current on the cyber-security training that UC offers.

MANAGING DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

Difficult conversations are part of the ecosystem of social media. People have a wide range of viewpoints and often lack decorum or professionalism in how they express them. In addition to the guidance noted above, here are tips for dealing with [trolls](#) (with thanks to our UC Berkeley colleagues).

Dealing with trolls

Internet trolls are a perennial problem for any public-facing website or social media platform. Though they can be an annoyance and even cause damage to your reputation, there are a few simple ways to avoid major issues.

In case you're not familiar, a troll is a slang term referring to a person who sows discord on the Internet by starting arguments or upsetting people, by posting inflammatory, extraneous, or off-topic messages in an online community (such as a newsgroup, forum, chat room, or blog) with the deliberate intent of provoking readers into an emotional response or of otherwise disrupting normal on-topic discussion, often for their own amusement.

- Don't feed them. Sometimes, the best approach is to ignore them. Like some schoolyard bullies, many trolls are just looking to get a reaction. Deny them that, and they often go away.
- Don't take it personally. Trolls often make personal attacks to incite a response. Keep in mind that the troll doesn't know you; they are just trying to agitate you. It's better not to let them get under your skin and avoid getting drawn into a personal argument with them.
- Rely on your community. In many cases, your loyal followers will come to your defense, sometimes even before you've seen the troll's initial comments. Allowing your most passionate supporters to be the ones to shout down the troll can help preserve your reputation without requiring you to enter the fray.
- Be careful about censorship. Familiarize yourself with compliance obligations under FERPA and university policies prohibiting discrimination and harassment.
- Report hate speech. If a troll posts hate speech on a social media platform, you can usually report it directly through the social media channel, motivating the platform to block or ban the troll.
- Avoid becoming embroiled in legal conversations. If you're not qualified to make legal comments, don't. These might be used against you.
- Utilize official statements. If someone is trolling about an issue that your unit or the administration has already issued a statement on, it may be best to simply post the statement in response to the troll.
- Ask for help. If you're not sure how to respond to a troll, don't. Contact Strategic Communications for input.

Additional considerations:

- If you're getting hostile responses, review your specific tweet and decide if there was something on your part that could have caused such a reaction.
- If you choose to engage with an angry or trolling response, understand that it is not about "winning." A single response is generally the most effective; respond, but make it clear the attention and response is not going to continue by keeping it short and to the point.
- Utilize the mute/hide features. Sometimes the way people say things might annoy you. If you find yourself wanting to reply to something annoying or uncomfortable, it may be a better idea to simply mute/hide the person, particularly if it is someone that it seems important to continue following.
- Block and don't engage with hostile prompts.

More information on dealing with trolls:
https://ideas.ted.com/smart-ways-to-handle-snark-and-trolls-on-social-media/

OFFICIAL SOCIAL MEDIA POLICIES FOR UC ANR-BRANDED ACCOUNTS

Social media usage at UC ANR is governed by all official policies. **Read the policies** listed below before engaging in social media as part of your official duties. All uses of social media must follow the professional ethical standards expected of UC employees. All social media guidelines are in addition to, and complement, existing policies or guidelines regarding the use of technology, computers, email and the internet.

UC ANR reserves the right to block or remove the content of any post that violates UC policies. All content, information and views expressed on social media belong to the individual posting the content and do not necessarily reflect UC ANR's official policies or positions. UC ANR is not responsible for unanswered posts or inaccurate information posted by others.

The University of California is committed to the principles of academic freedom. In relation to social media, generally this means that UC academics using social media can engage in intellectual debate without fear of censorship or retaliation and have the right to express their views online, provided they are not in conflict with other UC policies and codes of conduct.

UC Electronic Communications Policy
(Robin Sanchez is UC ANR's policy analyst)

Use of the University's Name

UC Sexual Harassment Policy

UC Intellectual Property Policies and Guidance

UC Statement of Privacy Values

Social Media Privacy Act

Academic Freedom

[UC ANR Principles of Community](#)

Tips for compliance with official UC policies
Ensure content is **[accessible](#)** to those with disabilities. Add captions to photos and videos. Learn the accessibility requirements and periodically test your content for accessibility. Read the [Section 508 Standards](#) and the [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0](#) and other key resources that discuss them. We also recommend this helpful [resource](#) from the University of Minnesota for making your social media content accessible.

Follow laws governing copyright and fair use of copyrighted material owned by others (see University of California intellectual property [information](#) and [UC Electronic Communications Policy](#) for details). Do not post content that violates any federal or state laws and regulations. When in doubt, don't post it.

In the spirit of sharing on social networks, it's best to link to others' work and give them the proper credit, rather than to reproduce it. Another best practice is to ask the owner of the material for permission to post it on social media. Always provide proper **attribution** on your information and images.

Do not advertise on behalf of external vendors on UC ANR social media presences or **endorse** third-party products and services. Advertising, solicitation, or overtly favorable acknowledgments or endorsements of third-party products and services constitute a violation of university policy and therefore are not allowed. As a state entity, UC ANR is subject to **laws regarding political speech**. The University may not endorse/oppose (or contribute to) political candidates, nor may University resources (including University-paid time or equipment) be used for campaign purposes in connection with ballot propositions.

Be aware of the [Social Media Privacy Act](#), which prohibits public and private college employees and representatives from requiring or requesting a student, prospective student or student group to disclose, access or divulge personal social media account information.

PLATFORM-SPECIFIC POLICIES AND GUIDELINES
(These are company-specific policies and guidelines, not UC policies.)

Twitter: https://help.twitter.com/en/rules-and-policies
Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/policies
LinkedIn: https://www.linkedin.com/help/linkedin/suggested/34593/linkedin-professional-community-policies?lang=en
Instagram: https://help.instagram.com/477434105621119
YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/about/policies/#community-guidelines

With thanks to the following sites referenced:
Purdue Extension: https://ag.purdue.edu/extension/communication/Pages/socialmedia.aspx
University of Arkansas Extension: https://www.uaex.edu/social-media/policies-best-practices.aspx
University of Minnesota: https://accessibility.umn.edu/tutorials/accessible-social-media
UC Berkeley: https://brand.berkeley.edu/guidelines/

UC Davis: https://www.ucdavis.edu/social-media/guidelines/
UCOP: https://link.ucop.edu/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/ucop-social-media-guidelines.pdf
UC San Diego: https://ucpa.ucsd.edu/resources/social/
UCSF: https://www.ucsf.edu/communications/social-media-personal and
https://www.ucsf.edu/communications/social-media-guidelines

DEFINITIONS

Accessibility - refers to the design of products, devices, services, or environments so as to be usable by people with disabilities.

Branded accounts – social media accounts operated by UC ANR personnel or volunteers that are branded with the name of the division or its programs (4-H, UC Master Gardener, UCCE, etc.).

Consistency - refers to having an organized, well-thought out plan for regularly disseminating social media content. The recommendation for most social media platforms is daily posting and/or sharing of others' content.

Content - refers to communications materials created for social media and can include written copy, photographs, videos, lists, guides, infographics, etc.

Metrics - data, and the patterns found in that data, often used to make marketing or advertising decisions. A website or application gathers data using a cookie or other tracking tag that monitors users' behavior. The tag activates when users begin their visits then stores data about what pages they visited, what actions they completed, and how they interacted with different elements such as clicking on buttons or performing a search. Common social media metrics include:
- Follower count
- Engagement count – number of likes, comments, retweets, etc. from your audience
- Engagement rate - percentage of users who saw your social media post and took some action (clicked the link, replied, shared, retweeted, etc.).
- Impressions - number of times a piece of content is displayed
- Reach - maximum potential audience for any given message
- Clickthrough rate - number of clicks that a post receives divided by the number of times the post is shown. For example, if you had 5 clicks and 100 impressions, then your CTR would be 5%.

Personal accounts – social media accounts that are set up and managed by individual users and are not officially associated with the University of California name, programs or resources.

Social media – social media refers to websites and applications that are designed to allow people to share content quickly, efficiently, and in real-time. These sites and applications facilitate the sharing of ideas, thoughts, and information through the building of virtual networks and communities. Examples include FaceBook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, Reddit, YouTube and blogs, among many others.

Social media strategy - a blueprint that answers the what, when, how, and why for all the content you post on your social pages. Plans should identify what you are trying to achieve, who you are trying to reach, and your strategy for reaching them.

Troll - a social media user who makes a deliberately offensive or annoying postings with the sole aim of provoking other users.