



Town of Andover Communications Policy

Purpose

The Andover Communication Policy establishes guidelines for the creation and use by the Town of Andover (the “Town”), its departments, divisions and/or employees of available communication channels used to conduct official business for the Town, including print (Town mailings), online (website and email lists) and other channels as they develop (social media). The Town actively utilizes several Communication Channels to inform and engage its residents, businesses, elected officials, local media, and visitors. Communication is a leading method of customer service and, if done well, builds confidence and trust in Town governance. As the proliferation of these Channels improve and demand for information increases, it is vital that Andover staff engage in communications on behalf of the Town that work in concert to promote the interests and goals of the Town, and within relevant legal obligations.

As a public Entity, the Town and its Users should abide by certain standards in how they communicate with the public that serves all its constituents. The intended purpose behind establishing and maintaining the Andover Communication Policy is to disseminate information from the Town to its residents to:

- Provide accurate, helpful, and timely information about the Town of Andover for the general public in a professional manner;
- Promote the interests of the Town in concert with Andover's goals;
- Provide information aimed to increase understanding about how the Town operates; and
- Be a leader in the delivery of efficient and effective quality services that respond to community needs and builds trust with residents.

General Policy

The Town has an overriding interest and expectation in deciding what is “spoken” on its behalf.

- A. The assignment of any User or creation of a Communication Channel is subject to approval:
- Users of the Town’s website are assigned by their respective Department Head.
 - It is the responsibility of each Department Head to provide a copy of this policy to their respective Users.
 - Creation of Town Social Media Channel or Email List is subject to the approval of the Town Manager. Department Heads submit their request to the Deputy Town Manager.
- B. The Town’s website, andoverma.gov, will remain the Town’s primary and predominant public communication presence. Always reference andoverma.gov (or associated shortcut, example: andoverma.gov/police) in all press releases. Social media sites should link back to the respective home page(s) on the Town’s website where documents, forms, and other information necessary to conduct business with the Town are available.

- C. All Town social media sites should make clear that they are maintained by the Town, provide a link to this Andover Communication Policy and provide a disclaimer communicating the level of response to comments on any social media.
- D. The Town shall maintain administrative rights on all Channels (social media, email lists) and coordinate these rights with the Deputy Town Manager and Technology Department. The Town will occasionally monitor content on all Town Communication Channels to ensure adherence to this policy and that the interests and goals of the Town are being served. However, content oversight is the responsibility of the respective Entity.
- E. All Town Communication Channels shall adhere to applicable federal, state, and local laws, rules, regulations and policies, including, but not limited to: Records Retention, Public Records and Open Meeting Laws.
- F. Users representing the Town via its various Communication Channels shall conduct themselves at all times as a representative of the Town in accordance with all Town rules, regulations, and policies.
- G. The Town reserves the right to restrict or remove any content that is deemed in violation of this policy or any applicable laws, rules, regulations, or policies and any content/comments on topics or issues not related to Town business. Any content removed based on this policy must be retained by the Entity's User who removed it in adherence to public records retention laws. Included with this record should be the date, time and identity of the poster, when available.
- H. Advertising, Endorsement Limitations, and Sponsorship of Town Events. Procurement and ethics laws largely prohibit Town employees or agencies from endorsing products, businesses, or vendors. In addition, Town resources, such as Town-sponsored Social Media entities should not be used for political purposes.
- I. The Andover Communication Policy may be updated and amended from time to time at the discretion of the Town Manager.

Content Coordination For Town Departments

Users should coordinate content postings on department pages and channels with their Department Head. Content for dissemination for the home page of the Town's website, Town Notices (email), and alert banners should be coordinated with the Town Manager's office, **prior to its release to the media**. For non-emergency content, the following timelines are recommended to ensure maximum effectiveness of your outreach:

- For one-time significant Town-wide impact, such as new trash regulations or new water/sewer rate changes, a one month notification to the Deputy Town Manager is recommended to develop a Communication Plan, messaging and to produce any associated print or online materials.
- For large events that don't necessarily require resident action, such as a social or dedication event, or upcoming short-term projects with limited impacts (example: road paving), a two week notification to the Deputy Town Manger is recommended to schedule event postings and reminders on the Town's main channels.
- For urgent communications that are not emergencies (example: Town Offices closed, winter parking ban) notification should be coordinated with the Deputy Town Manager.

For Emergency notifications through CodeRED refer to the January 8, 2015 CodeRED policy.

Communication Guidelines & Considerations

Consider Your Content, Communicate and Publish Responsibly. All Town communication is considered official government communications. Be mindful that what you publish will be public for a long time in accordance with public records retention laws. As informal as social media sites are meant to be, if they are on a government domain or a government entity, they are considered official government communication. Social media sites will be sought out by mainstream media and constituents, so a great deal of thought needs to go into how social media will be used in a way that benefits both the Town and the public.

Communicate Only to Contribute to your Entity's Mission. When you communicate, provide worthwhile information and a perspective that contributes to the Town's mission of serving the public. What you publish will reflect on you, your Entity and the Town. Communication Channels should be used in a way that contributes to the Town's mission and builds trust with residents by:

- Helping you and your members perform their tasks better;
- Informing citizens about government services and how to access them, and;
- Making the operations of your Entity transparent and accessible to the public.

Understand Users' First Amendment Rights. Although the Town of Andover can moderate the social media sites that accept comments from the public (such as social media comments) to restrict speech that is obscene, threatening, discriminatory, harassing or off topic, the Town cannot use the moderation function to restrict speech with which the Town of Andover merely disagrees (i.e. subject matter restrictions). Site users have some First Amendment rights in posting content to public social media sites hosted by Andover. Town Users must respect those rights and not delete these comments, unless they violate the "Terms of Comments."

Terms of Comments. On social media channels, Andover will foster conversations that follow the rules of polite discourse, and we ask that participants treat each other, as well as our employees, with respect. The following comments will be deleted from social media channels:

- Profanity and vulgar or abusive language;
- Sensitive information that could compromise public safety;
- Threats of physical or bodily harm; and
- Offensive terms that target protected classes, such as ethnic, racial, sexual orientation, transgendered or religious groups.

Respect Copyright Law. Andover Users must abide by laws governing copyright and fair use of copyrighted material owned by others. Whole articles or publications should never be reprinted without first receiving written permission from the publication owner. Instead, a short excerpt of someone else's work can be quoted and, if possible, a link provided to the original.

Protect Confidential Information. Your Entity's confidential information should not be shared including legally protected personal information that you have obtained from your Entity. Ask permission to publish or report on conversations that occur within your Entity. Additionally, information about policies or plans that have not been finalized by your Entity should not be posted unless you have received explicit permission from your supervisor or the Town Manager.

Provide Links. When you make a reference to a law, regulation, policy or other website, where possible, provide a link or at a minimum, cite the source. Do not generalize about information obtained from studies without including a citation.

Respect Your Audience and the Town. Remember that our constituents reflect a diverse set of customs, values and points of view. Be professional and respectful. This includes not only the obvious (no ethnic slurs, personal insults, obscenity, threats of violence, etc.) but also proper consideration of privacy and of topics that may be considered objectionable or inflammatory—such as party politics and religion. Do not use any of the Town’s Communication Channels to air your differences with residents, Town policy, or employees. Show proper consideration for others' privacy and for topics that may be considered objectionable, insensitive, or inflammatory.

Be Transparent, Admit to Your Mistakes. Once something is posted on a Communication Channel, it should stay posted for the length of time it is relevant. Some Content will have a short life span (news item), while others will remain in perpetuity (Minutes). Only spelling or grammar errors should be made without making the change evident to users on any Communication Channel. If you choose to modify an earlier posting with a substantive change, make it clear that you have done so. On social media, do not remove or delete the incorrect content; provide the correct information and apologize for the error. Ways to accomplish this include: strike through the error and correct, or create a new post with the correct information and link to it from the post you need to correct or clarify. Either method is acceptable. The goal is to achieve transparency. We cannot change Content that has already been published without making the changes clearly evident to users.

Use Your Best Judgment. If you are about to publish something that makes you even the slightest bit uncomfortable, review the suggestions above and reflect on why that is. If you are still unsure, do not post it until you can discuss it with the head of your Entity or with the Deputy Town Manager.

Handling Media Inquiries. Active communication and outreach may lead to increased inquiries from the media. If you are contacted directly by a reporter, you should refer media questions to the head of your Entity or the Town Manager’s office.

If a Channel has been compromised please contact the Deputy Town Manager and Information Technology Department immediately.

Terminology

- The term “Users” means any staff that communicates on behalf of the Town in a professional capacity.
- The term “Entity” refers to your department or division.
- The term “Communications Channel” or “Channel” refers to an Entity’s information channel in which to delivery content to the public such as a website, email list, social media presence, or similar delivery mechanism.