



GUIDE: CREATING POSITIVE, NONPARTISAN CONTENT

The Foundation of a Social Media Strategy

The work you are doing for your county every day is incredibly important. When it comes to social media, we want to identify the goals that you want to address for your county and turn them into social media themes that you will refer to again and again — to find ways to highlight your work and accomplishments. Once we do that, we have the foundation of a social media strategy!

1. Identify goals
 - Familiarize the public with the agency and humanize agency employees
 - For example, Haywood County began posting with a #FacesOfHaywood theme, introducing employees with photos.
 - Highlight local businesses
 - Show that your cities/towns are rebuilding and open for business. Did a local business recently replace their flooring after flooding? Was a restaurant in the area able to reopen? Did a new business start laying the groundwork to open? Any business's success is your county's success, and it's worth sharing in a social media post.
 - Showcase tourism and travel opportunities
 - Bed and Breakfasts and hotels throughout your county
 - Historic homes (consider featuring a historic home tour)
 - Museums and cultural attractions
 - Natural sites, parks, and scenic spots — especially for fall leaf-peeping
2. Highlight accomplishments
 - With each post, also include a fact about what your county has done to contribute to the success of the business/initiative featured
 - Examples: We helped this business secure a grant; we helped clear debris from this site.

Staying Nonpartisan

Messaging

Refrain from using political figures in social media whenever possible. Do not post or share posts that react to political rhetoric.

Exceptions from state and local lawmakers: If Governor Stein's or Senator Tillis's office, for example, shares a factual press release about emergency relief that contains useful information for residents, that will likely be worth sharing. Evaluate the content for whether it stays fact-based rather than opinion-based.

- Does it reference credible sources and experts?
- Does it reference other politicians in a negative way? If not, it is safe to share.



Media Interviews

We are in a climate in which reporters frequently contact county sources for help contextualizing statements that come from the President or polarizing political figures. Reporters don't do this with a bad motive – they are trying to give “fair coverage” and get “both sides” of a story. However, this is setting up the county to be one side of a “both sides” story – and that is not helpful in maintaining trust among all of its residents.

The media is a valuable outlet for giving the audience important information, so it is worth carefully walking this line. When a reporter contacts you to be a part of a story, you have options besides simply saying “yes” or “no” to an interview.

- Contact the reporter to get more information on their story, and make it clear your county is nonpartisan.
- If you sense it may be a political story, refrain from going on-camera. You can offer to answer questions off-camera over email. Know that reporters aren't always willing to email questions, as it's not considered best practice. However, you can also offer to send over a useful website or recent press release on the topic.
- “This is a nonpartisan county government, so we can't comment on political stories. However, I'm happy to provide you with more information on the topic you are asking about.”
- “Hello [reporter]. I received your email, and I wanted to call you and get some background – **off the record**. Can you tell me more about your story? Who else are you planning to talk to? Is this about today's White House statement? I'm happy to help and send you more information, but we need to stay out of political stories. It's very important that we make it clear that the county is nonpartisan, and we're here to serve everyone.”
- “I'm not able to comment on-camera for this story, but I'm glad you are covering FEMA resources today. Let me send you information on how residents can apply and how many have applied so far. Feel free to email me more questions if you have them.”

Finding and Sharing Positive Stories

Positive Story Pitches

When a reporter contacts you to be a part of a story, it is a two-way street – and they are now a new, potentially very useful, contact for your agency. Tell them you have some story ideas for them and take the opportunity to highlight them. Reporters are always looking for stories – they want “real people” stories and you have access to these feel-good stories through your work. One of the most important factors in a story being published is whether you are able to connect the reporter with a person who is directly affected by the issue at hand.

- Example: “We recently assisted a family who moved into a FEMA trailer for emergency housing. They have now been able to get back on their feet, and they are rebuilding their home. They've told me they would be willing to be on-camera. Are you interested in talking to them? I can reach out to them and see if it's okay for me to give you their contact information.”



Creating Positive Social Media Posts

Your county's social media functions as your own newsroom, and it's a great place to share positive stories. In your work, positive stories are happening all the time – they happen in the small moments that are actually big stories. Every step of Hurricane Helene recovery is a positive story that can be told using a small moment.

We tell these stories through social media posts that have two main components:

1. The content – photo, video, or a graphic
 - Posts that share a video or photo are going to attract the most attention.
 - No photo? No problem. Take a related photo – for instance, of the location where the event happened, or of the employee who assisted.
 - When taking photos or videos, keep privacy in mind. You can take a photo in any public area. If you are moving quickly (for instance, taking a photo of the debris removal process), be sure to take photos that don't show anyone's face.
2. The caption
 - Highlights the emotion
 - Notes the agency's accomplishments. How did we help?
 - 3-4 sentences are fine
 - Conversational writing, humor, or puns are all appropriate in positive posts.

Positive Post Examples

General Snapshot

"Wow! Look at the size of this tree stump. The homeowner told us she's relieved to have it cleared from her curb. Our teams have now cleared more than 1 million cubic yards of debris!"

Special Moment

"REUNION: Take a look at this heartwarming video. It shows the moment this Spruce Pine family was reunited with their missing pup. The family had been living in temporary housing, and they were able to find Rufus at an out-of-town shelter after a three-month search. The county helped more than 1,000 of our families access temporary housing after Helene, and we're glad to see many who have been able to rebuild and reunite." (For a specific story like this, ask permission to share and pitch to media.)

Highlight the Agency

Intro: Briefly introduce an employee, their role, and how long they've worked for the agency. How were they affected by Helene?

Mission: Take a photo of an employee in the middle of their work – a visual project, if possible – at the site of Helene cleanup or rebuilding. Talk about what they're doing to highlight your mission.



Social Media Comments

A community agency should respond to correct misinformation on its own social media accounts, and after that, there is no need to engage further (in other words, no need to argue or debate).

Important Considerations

- Create a social media policy vetted by your legal counsel.
- Ensure that any moderating of comments (hiding) follows the policy.
- Be aware that even following policy, there is a risk of 1st Amendment violation accusations.
- You cannot moderate comments for simply being negative or contrary.

