

Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission Social Media Policy

Overview

The Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission (NIRPC) will use a social media presence to bolster its public outreach and communications capabilities. This will benefit NIRPC through greater public interaction, and the public by having another avenue to be informed of NIRPC's activities as well as other events and information relevant to NIRPC's goals for implementing the current Comprehensive Regional Plan (CRP).

Posting Frequency

A steady stream of content is essential to generate, maintain, and grow audiences on both Twitter and Facebook. The objective is quality over quantity. The ideal number of posts is no more than five posts per day, with an ideal minimum being three. However, posts should not be put up just to meet a quota. Photos count as a posting, and should always have a caption, as those without have the lowest rate of response.

Posting Guidelines

The content manager's goal will be to post responses within the same business day. Even if the content manager doesn't know the answer, the post should be acknowledged, stating that the comment/reply/question will be addressed in more detail within one business day via e-mail, direct message, Twitter reply, or Facebook comment. Responses to questions/replies/comments regarding specific properties or issues not relevant or appropriate for the larger audience will be provided privately by direct message.

Inappropriate, defamatory, profane, personal, or confidential information posted in Facebook comments will be deleted as soon as possible, but only after the comment is saved in a location that can be accessed later for public records requests. Twitter replies are posted to the user's individual page and cannot be removed by NIRPC or its designees. Facebook and Twitter pages expose NIRPC to negative public comments or replies, but that risk is not unlike comments provided at public meetings and other open forums. Social media allows NIRPC to clarify errors and assumptions made by the social media public by posting correct information.

While the tone of NIRPC Twitter feeds and Facebook pages is somewhat more conversational and informal than traditional NIRPC communications, content managers should maintain a separation between their professional and private lives on both social media tools. NIRPC staff is not to install non-approved third-party applications to the Facebook pages or interface.

Under no circumstances should content managers provide personal information such as their:

- Personal (non-business) addresses
- Personal (non-business) phone numbers or e-mail addresses
- Personal information, such as social security numbers, health information, children's names, spouse names, or personal schedule details
- Personal photos or videos.

Posting Tone

Both Twitter and Facebook encourage ongoing conversations between NIRPC and followers. Because both tools encourage ongoing dialogues between content managers and followers, the “tone” or “voice” of comments posted by content managers to Twitter and Facebook should be distinct and different from NIRPC’s traditional public “voice.”

Twitter posts should be relatively informal and conversational. Many posts should be open-ended and designed to start or spark conversation strings, promoting a human voice. Twitter posts should focus on new or recent announcements, improvements, or developments. The information will not be in real time, but should be current.

Content Managers may use text shorthand (“r” for “are”; “u” for “you,” for example) where space is limited, but should avoid shorthand that is not generally understood or accepted by Twitter audiences.

Facebook posts should have a more planned and unambiguous tone. They should be slightly more “official” in tone and voice compared to Twitter posts, but should not have the formality of NIRPC’s traditional media messages.

Twitter and Facebook posts that will start conversations between NIRPC and social media followers are highly encouraged. Content managers should also report or retweet relevant information from other relevant entities and organizations from the local, state, and federal levels to make NIRPC’s social media an information hub for planning activities in the region the promote the goals of NIRPC’s CRP.

External User Guidelines

- Graphic, obscene, explicit, racial, or otherwise discriminatory comments or submissions are not allowed.
- Comments that are abusive, hateful, or intended to defame anyone or any organization are not allowed.
- Comments suggesting or encouraging illegal activity are not allowed.
- Solicitations and advertisements are not allowed, including the promotion or endorsement of any financial, commercial, or non-governmental agency. Similarly, we do not allow attempts to defame or defraud any financial, commercial, or non-governmental agency.
- NIRPC social media cannot be used for comments promoting or opposing any person campaigning for election to a political office or promoting or opposing any ballot proposition.
- NIRPC reviews all comments and reserve the right to discard messages containing inappropriate content.
- Appearance of external links does not constitute any official endorsement on behalf of the Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission.

Comments will not be edited by the Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission or its staff. However, only comments that comply with NIRPC's use policy will be approved for posting. The use of vulgar, offensive, defamatory (personal attacks), threatening or harassing language is prohibited, and comments or user accounts therein are subject to removal.

Public comments on NIRPC-generated content should be limited to comments related to the posted topic. NIRPC social media channels are not the proper place to express opinions or beliefs not directly related to subjects/areas in which NIRPC conducts its business. (ex.: transportation policies & programs). If comments left on our social media postings are constructive, we view those posts as an opportunity to discuss, clear up misunderstandings, or otherwise work through whatever issues the person is having. We encourage comments on content shared via our social media channels, as all viewpoints are welcome, but citizen participation must be constructive. We reserve the right to make editorial decisions regarding submitted comments, including but not limited to removal of comments.

Communications made through e-mail and messaging systems within social media channels will in no way constitute a legal or official notice or comment to NIRPC (or any official or employee of NIRPC) for any purpose. For example, a post, comment, Tweet, or Facebook message that asks NIRPC to provide public records will not be considered a public records request until being sent through the proper channels.

Comments on NIRPC plans and work programs to be entered into the public record shall be submitted through traditional means, or the formal transportation planning process. Inquiries specific to a NIRPC project or program should be submitted directly to the appropriate NIRPC staff member via the staff contact list on NIRPC's website, <http://www.nirpc.org>.

As social media is a fast-evolving means of public interface, this policy statement is subject to amendment or modification at any time to ensure its continued use is consistent with its intended purpose as a limited forum. Questions or concerns regarding NIRPC's social media presence should be directed to Stephen Sostaric at 219-763-6060, ext. 155, or ssostaric@nirpc.org.

Adopted: May 23, 2013