

PART 2015 - INFORMATION

Subpart G - New Media Roles, Responsibilities, and Authorities

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PART 2015 - INFORMATION

Subpart G - New Media Roles, Responsibilities, and Authorities

§ 2015.301 Purpose.

This Instruction establishes policies and procedures for implementing new media tools and technologies within Rural Development. This Instruction will ensure that all Rural Development's new media efforts use the *One USDA* approach for style, content, and engagement of the public. The *One USDA* approach provides a consistent, valuable experience for stakeholders that aligns all agencies and state offices. In addition, this Instruction explains Rural Development's Office of External Affairs (OEA) role in evaluating new media efforts and supporting technologies.

§ 2015.302 Applicability and Scope.

This Instruction applies to all internal and external new media sites, accounts, or profiles for Rural Development communication efforts, including sites owned, managed, and/or developed under contract.

§ 2015.303 Definitions.

- (a) New media. New media encompasses digital technologies that facilitate interactions and electronic communication among stakeholders using a variety of web or mobile-based tools.
- (b) Social media. Social media encompasses activities that use digital technologies for social engagement and content delivery.
- (c) Type of media. New media technologies and communication methodologies can include, but are not limited to, blogs, photo and video sharing services, social networking platforms, geospatial mapping tools, discussion forums, and wikis. These technologies may enable social tagging, bookmarking, and mobile messaging. Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Flickr are examples of some commonly used technologies.

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§ 2015.304 Responsibilities.

The Rural Development Office of External Affairs is responsible for the following in relation to new media accounts:

(a) Developing communication plans; requesting permission from the USDA Office of Communications (OC) to establish Rural Development accounts; and developing, monitoring, and revising content about Rural Development, as follows:

- (1) Assisting states with new media requests, reviewing the requests, and submitting the requests to OC for approval.
- (2) Consulting with OC on new media account approval, guidance, archiving, and technology development.
- (2) Drafting and establishing integrated communication strategic plans to include new media efforts within existing Rural Development communication goals and objectives.
- (3) Coordinating, promoting, and cross-promoting Rural Development's new media profiles and accounts and leveraging other USDA or Rural Development accounts to increase the reach and effectiveness of new media efforts.
- (4) Supporting USDA-wide new media outreach and initiatives.
- (5) Monitoring content and accounts for reach and effectiveness using available Internet-based new media tracking tools.

(b) Ensuring that new media activities are conducted in the same professional manner as other USDA communication efforts and support the *One USDA* approach.

(c) Ensuring that Rural Development-designated new media contributors are adequately trained and comply with applicable authorities and regulations.

§ 2015.305 Requesting and Establishing New Media Accounts.

(a) Prior to engaging in new media activities or establishing an official new media account, employees are required to review Departmental Directive (DR) 1495-001 "New Media Roles, Responsibilities and Authorities."

(b) Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Flickr, or other new media accounts shall not be established without approval from OEA and OC. To request a new media account, agencies or state offices must submit an email to the Rural Development Social Media Committee (SMC), socialmedia@rd.usda.gov, with the phrase "New Media Request" as the subject line, and with the following materials attached:

- (1) AD-3022 "New Media Request Form," and
- (2) Strategic Communication Plan, as appropriate.

(c) OEA will evaluate requests to establish new media accounts or activities within Rural Development. Once the request has been accepted by Rural Development, OEA will submit the request to OC for final approval.

(d) Access to new media tools and technologies will be approved or denied based on current policy, existing USDA services and contracts, the availability of similar tools or resources, and the capacity to support new media activities or digital technologies.

§ 2015.306 Publishing.

(a) Publishing content using new media accounts or platforms does not replace official communication mechanisms, such as existing Rural Development websites and official news releases.

(b) Content published to official new media accounts or platforms, or distributed through official digital media, must be Section 508 compliant to the maximum extent possible on the platform, in accordance with DR 4030-001 "Section 508 Program" and DR 4030-1 "Section 508 Implementation - Final Guidance."

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(c) Content should be published to official new media accounts or platforms according to the following:

(1) National Office content must be approved by OEA before publication or distribution. State content and accounts will be monitored by OEA for adherence to established policies.

(2) Rural Development supports the *One USDA* approach by contributing Rural Development content to USDA's new media accounts, as appropriate. States that do not have a new media account on a specific platform may submit content to the Rural Development SMC for consideration for the national Rural Development or USDA account, as appropriate.

(3) Currently, some social media platforms are not compliant with Section 508, but links shared on social media must lead to Section 508-compliant web content, publications, and videos.

(4) Records must be maintained for original or unique content created or published to new media platforms, such as information posted by individuals acting on behalf of Rural Development or public comments.

(5) Each office is responsible for maintaining records about its new media accounts, platforms, and activities.

§ 2015.307 Content Contributions.

(a) Only approved Rural Development personnel may contribute content to and engage with stakeholders using new media accounts and platforms within their official capacity. State Directors may designate official content contributors for state-level new media accounts. Content may include information about Rural Development state events and activities, including agency administrator activities in the state.

(b) Approval must be obtained from OEA and OC before creating Rural Development new media accounts or publishing content related to official duties to external accounts. For annual reporting purposes, OEA will maintain the official list of approved Rural Development new media accounts. New media accounts that were created without OEA and OC approval will immediately be closed.

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(c) When posting content, contributors must observe federal regulations and guidelines, such as the Hatch Act and DR 4300-003 "Equal Opportunity Public Notification Policy."

(d) Rural Development personnel supporting new media activities or representing Rural Development in an official capacity should use email addresses and websites created specifically and solely for official duties and that are separate from personal accounts for private use.

§ 2015.308 Personal Social Media Use.

Employees using new media sites or accounts for personal or private business should not claim to officially represent USDA, Rural Development, or their policies on personal accounts. Likewise, employees should not use USDA, Rural Development, or other U.S. government seals, logos, or mastheads on their personal accounts. Additionally, personal users of social media sites should not include official government agency names or titles in their user names (e.g., the Twitter handle @USDAJohnSmith for a personal account would not be acceptable).

Personal or private activities on new media accounts must not violate Federal ethics rules, including the Hatch Act. For guidance on a specific scenario, employees should consult with the Office of Ethics.

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