Social Media Outreach to Employees, Current and Future

Dear Reader:

The following document was created from the MTAS website (mtas.tennessee.edu). This website is maintained daily by MTAS staff and seeks to represent the most current information regarding issues relative to Tennessee municipal government.

We hope this information will be useful to you; reference to it will assist you with many of the questions that will arise in your tenure with municipal government. However, the *Tennessee Code Annotated* and other relevant laws or regulations should always be consulted before any action is taken based upon the contents of this document.

Please feel free to contact us if you have questions or comments regarding this information or any other MTAS website material.

Sincerely,

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With the popularity of social media, it is no surprise that municipalities and other local government entities are using social networking to connect with current and potential employees. Social media has evolved into an important strategic tool for outreach. It is highly important in becoming an employer of choice that cities engage and inform citizens, employees, and all relevant stakeholders. Social networking is an effective way for municipalities and employers to achieve this.

Some municipalities prefer social media tools such as blogs and podcasts, while others lean toward Twitter or Facebook. The choice of which social media forum to use will be community specific. Your information technology and legal departments should be consulted to ensure technical capability and policy compliance.

Much information that would traditionally be distributed to employees via a paper memo or email can be communicated via social media. However, attention should be paid to the content of the communication to insure privacy rights are respected and content is lawful (such as protected health information and/or private data).

Consider using social media to communicate upcoming job opportunities, employee events, benefit offerings, training opportunities, and volunteer programs. However, before the municipality launches full speed into social networking, it is important to have policies and procedures in place, and make sure that all persons understand them. MTAS has developed a sample Social Media Policy (available from your consultant) for your municipality to use as a template. Furthermore, employees must be provided information and training on the use of social media.

Once a municipality implements the use of social media, it should be prepared to acknowledge and address any comments or criticism that comes from the audience reached. A municipality can do this in a variety of ways such as instant polls, online focus groups, and by responding to comments and messages quickly and responsibly. Municipalities should set clear policies that include how employees reference their employer online, especially if these references are inappropriate or disparaging.

Gone are the days of long job advertisements in the Sunday paper. Organizations can now post job listings to websites including their own social networking sites where viewers can "share" the link with their contacts. Some recruiters use their personal social networking page as a business tool and job seekers can "friend" them which allows instant access to their profile and job openings. Some sites allow recruiters and employers to search and view profiles of people who become a "fan" of or "like" their company page. One advantage to social networking for recruitment is that passive job seekers can stay up to date on job openings without having to actively search the web or city websites.

As the popularity and access to social networking increase, employers must be aware of potential issues involving social media and employment law. A 2014 CareerBuilder.com survey showed that 51 percent of employers using social networking utilized information found on social networking sites in deciding not to hire someone. While it is tempting to search for information on potential hires, there are some significant legal exposures to doing so.

Legally, there may be nothing wrong with rejecting an applicant whose work-related characteristics may result in poor performance or inability to perform the essential functions of the job. However, it is critical for your municipality to base any applicant rejection on job related competencies and characteristics that are core to performing the work at hand, not on personal characteristics. Eliminating job applicants from the candidate pool due to religion, pregnancy status, disability, and country of origin (or any other protected status) is simply indefensible. Your municipality must always be able to demonstrate that decisions were based on job related criteria and not non-job-related information protected by local, state, and federal laws.

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