



# Virginia Cooperative Extension

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## Virginia Cooperative Extension Social Media Policy

### 1. Purpose

The purpose of social media usage for Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE) is to further our mission to provide access to unbiased, scientific information related to locally defined issues; create a presence in local communities; establish strong partnerships and collaborative coalitions; and provide innovative service to the commonwealth.

VCE recognizes the importance and use of social media platforms to reach these goals. The preservation of brand identities, integrity, and reputations for Virginia Tech, Virginia State University, and VCE must be considered when using social media tools.

These guidelines, in addition to the [Virginia Tech Social Media Policy](#), govern the publication of and commentary on social media by employees of VCE and its related entities. VCE employees must be familiar with Virginia Tech's social media policy and may publish or comment via social media tools in accordance with those, as well as these VCE guidelines.

This guide for Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE) is supplemental to the Virginia Tech social media policy, and in absence of a Virginia State University written policy, applies to VCE staff and faculty at both institutions.

#### 1.1 Social Media Platforms

For the purpose of these guidelines, social media relates to any medium for online publication and commentary including blogs and social media platforms such as, but not limited to, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, Pinterest, LinkedIn, Flickr, YouTube, Snapchat, Google+, and Tumblr.

Social media best practices and tips can be found [HERE](#).

### 2. Use of Social Media

VCE has a presence on most major social media platforms:

- Facebook

VT: <https://www.facebook.com/VirginiaCooperativeExtension>

VSU: <https://www.facebook.com/VsuCollegeOfAgriculture>

- Twitter

VT: [@VaCoopExt](#)



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VSU: [https://twitter.com/VSU\\_AG](https://twitter.com/VSU_AG)

- Instagram

VT: [https://www.instagram.com/virginia\\_cooperative\\_extension/](https://www.instagram.com/virginia_cooperative_extension/)

VSU: [https://www.instagram.com/vsu\\_ag](https://www.instagram.com/vsu_ag)

- Pinterest - <https://www.pinterest.com/vaextension/>

- YouTube

VT: <https://www.youtube.com/user/VAExtension>

VSU: <https://www.youtube.com/c/VirginiaCooperativeExtension>

## 2.1 Social media pages

- All VCE unit and 4-H Facebook pages should follow the main Virginia Cooperative Extension and Virginia 4-H social media pages.
- All VCE unit and 4-H Facebook pages should be “Local Business or Place” pages
  - Using a personal Facebook page for an organization is against [Facebook’s policy](#)
- If a unit’s page is a personal page, it must be merged into a business page and/or deleted.
  - Find more information about merging Facebook pages here: <https://www.facebook.com/help/249601088403018>
- Each VCE Unit should have one main social media page per platform on which to highlight content from all focus areas within the unit. If multiple Facebook pages currently exist, they should be merged with the main unit page. Learn how to do this [here](#).
  - Local 4-H units can have one separate page per platform.
  - This does not apply to 4-H clubs (local 4-H clubs, shooting, livestock, etc.). For more information on social media guidelines for clubs, visit <https://www.intra.ext.vt.edu/4h/orgguidelines.pdf>.
  - 4-H agents or local Extension office staff be an admin of and should monitor local 4-H club pages
  - Local Extension Master (Master Gardener, Master Naturalist, Master Energy, Master Food) programs may have their own unique pages.
  - 4-H Centers may have their own unique pages.
  - Pages should not be created for events. They should be promoted on the page by the host organization.



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- Specialists and agents should not have personal professional social media pages and should instead use the units' social media pages to promote and publicize their work.
- Creating VCE unit social media Facebook groups in lieu of business pages should be avoided.

## 2.1.2 Naming Conventions

### Virginia Cooperative Extension Unit Pages

- New and existing Virginia Cooperative Extension social media page names should follow this format.
  - Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram page names: Virginia Cooperative Extension - [Unit Name]
    - Example: "Virginia Cooperative Extension - Roanoke County"
  - Facebook username (max 50 characters): VCE[Unit]
    - Example: "VCERoanoke"
  - Instagram username (max 30 characters): vce\_[unit name]
    - Example: "vce\_Roanoke"
  - Twitter username (max 15 characters): VCE\_[unit name]
    - Example: "VCE\_Roanoke"
  - If you can't fit your unit's name fully in a Twitter or Instagram handle, you can leave out the word "county"

### Virginia 4-H Unit Pages

- New and existing Virginia 4-H unit social media page names should follow this format.
  - Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram page names: [County], VA 4-H
    - Example: "Giles County, VA 4-H"
  - Facebook username (max 50 characters): VCE[Unit]
    - Example: "GilesVA4H"
  - Instagram username (max 30 characters): vce\_[unit name]
    - Example: "GilesVA4H"
  - Twitter username (max 15 characters): VCE\_[unit name]
    - Example: "GilesVA4H"



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- For help changing a page name, visit:
  - Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/help/271607792873806>
  - Instagram: <https://help.instagram.com/529483457260403>
  - Twitter:  
<https://help.twitter.com/en/managing-your-account/change-twitter-handle>
- Social media best practices tips can be found [HERE](#).

## 2.2 Indicia & ADA Statements

- VCE indicia and ADA statements should be included in the "About Us" section of every VCE Facebook page and wherever else there is enough space in the "About Us" section to include it.
  - On social media platforms where it cannot be included due to character-count limitations, like Twitter and Instagram, whenever sharing information about a public program, there should be a link connected with that post for more information about that program on your website that includes the VCE indicia and ADA statements.
- The social media site should link back to the unit's official website and must provide clear contact information.
- When promoting events and programs make sure the information provides the appropriate ADA information.
  - It should be on the website or flier.
  - If it is not, it should be included as part of the social media post.
  - The official ADA statement information can be found at <https://sites.google.com/view/extintranet/marketing/logos-and-indicia>.

## 2.3 Moderation of comments and reporting abusive accounts

For more information about moderating comments and reporting abusive accounts, refer to the [Virginia Tech Social Media Handbook](#)

## 3. Social Media Accounts

### 3.1 Account Registration

- Before setting up a new VCE social media account, make sure your unit does not already have one.
- Register or update your unit's social media accounts [HERE](#)



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## 3.2 Inactive and Duplicate Accounts

- Accounts that have been inactive for one or more years should be deleted, merged with another page, or a plan for regularly posting content on the page again should be developed.
- If a unit has duplicate accounts, such as old pages or pages that cannot be accessed, they must be [merged](#) (Facebook) with current pages or deleted.

## 3.3 Account Administrators Roles & Responsibilities

- Extension employees who serve as account administrators for social media efforts are responsible for ensuring proper branding, frequent maintenance, relevance and currency of the information posted, and for monitoring comments posted by others.
- Each organization account should have 2-3 administrators with full access. Coordinate within offices to establish who is creating posts and their timing. A social media scheduling calendar can be a useful tool to ensure there are not overlapping posts.
- As stated in the [Virginia Tech Social Media Policy](#), account administrators must use discretion when liking or following other social media posts or accounts. These actions should reflect the opinions of Virginia Tech, Virginia State University and VCE and should not be used for personal interest or communication.
- When not posting as your page, be careful to switch from the business account to your personal account.
- The person who creates or shares the content is responsible for it.

## 4. Social Media Content

### 4.1 Quality of social media content

The quality of social media posts reflects on both your professional reputation and the organization.

- Avoid posting biased or information that is not research-based
- Avoid political endorsements or posts
- Avoid endorsing products or other items for sale
- Avoid posting or sharing information that would be considered taking a stance on issues that are controversial (i.e. organic vs GMO)
- Do not use unclear industry jargon
  - Social media audiences range in levels of knowledge about specific topics, so make sure writing is understandable to all



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- Spell check and proofread carefully
- Be clear and concise
- Use appropriate photos and edit them properly
  - If you have questions, contact [Deanna Sumners](#) (VT) or [Erica Shambley](#) (VSU)
- If sharing links from a source other than VCE or 4-H, know what the webpage is, and make sure it provides credible information and does not contain offensive content.
- Only share content from reliable sources.
  - Do not share biased or personal information on a VCE social media page.
- Remember you are representing VCE through organizational social media pages, so avoid treating these pages as personal pages.
- Avoid sharing posts or content that could appear as a product or business endorsement.
- Use the proper organizational voice when writing posts.
  - When posting to a VCE unit or 4-H page, always write in third person (we/our) and not first person (I/my).

## 4.1 Branding

- It is recommended that the VCE official logo be displayed on the social media site as part of the profile or banner image.
- Graphics created for social media pages should follow proper branding guidelines
  - [VCE Brand Guide](#)
  - [VCE Colors](#)
  - [4-H Brand Guide](#)
  - [4-H Colors](#)
- Logos should be used in approved manners and should not be used to promote individual, promotional, or political interests.
  - Logos can be found [HERE](#).

## 4.3 VCE Civil Rights/Accessibility policy

- Communication about Extension programs at the local level to ensure that all persons, especially those who previously may not have participated fully, know about the availability and effective use of Extension program services and are encouraged to participate
- Informing organizations and groups with which VCE cooperates of our non-discrimination provisions
- Use of non-sexist language and non-discriminatory language, photos, and graphics to convey the message of equal opportunity in all programming



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- Provision of materials in alternative means of communication (Braille, large print, audiotape, interpretation, etc.) upon request