



# Social media, federal policy & communications in the digital age

Don't get caught inside...



# Catalytic Events

- USDA disavows gag-order emailed to scientific research unit (Reuters, January 24, 2017)
- USDA scrambles to ease concerns after researchers were ordered to stop publishing news releases (Washington Post, January 25, 2017)



# What really happened?

- Internal email sent to staff at the ARS
- Called for a suspension of all “public-facing documents,” including news releases and photos...
- Email sent was almost identical to a note previously circulated 4 years earlier: what changed?
- Are LGU’s supported by the USDA subject to similar communications mandates?



# Institutional social media policies

- Scanned the region
- 12/13 institutions have posted social media policies and guidelines
- Characteristics
  - How to's?
  - University branding
  - Best practices
  - Etiquette
  - Compliance (representing the University)
  - Approval
  - Violation consequences

# Best of the best...

- If you wouldn't put on a flier, etch it on a brick or publish it in the Wall Street Journal, don't post it (UDC)
- Strategize, launch, engage, monitor, make time, measure success (UNH)
- Retweeting ≠ endorsement (UMD)
- Breaking news (Cornell)
  - Good (discuss with higher-ups and communications people)
  - Bad
    - Ignore
    - Press release
    - Engage deeply (be careful, social media not 1° emergency communications)
- Take the high road (PSU)

# How 'bout the feds?

- USDA uses 3<sup>rd</sup> party strategies to interact with public. Forward comments to the chief privacy officer...
- Don't make negative statements, don't do it on duty, can't use title, photo or institutional affiliation (aimed at political activities)



# Whether you're engaged or not, you're subject to the effects of social media...

- How do you use social media?
- Strategies to follow institutional policies?
- Does your staff understand, appreciate and follow the policies?
- What is the quality control?
- What resources do you have available for managing social media?
- Information leakage, how did/would you handle?
- How have you dealt with negative outfall?