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Australian Government
Attorney-General's Department



THINK, PLAN, ENGAGE

SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY



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INTRODUCTION

Social media platforms are important communication channels that provide new and innovative opportunities for the Attorney-General's Department (AGD) to engage directly with our stakeholders and with the community at large, in ways that simply are not available through traditional channels of communication.



These platforms create unique opportunities for the Department to engage with stakeholders and the public about our ideas and theirs, to listen to their feedback, and to inform them about what we do and what we are achieving. These platforms provide new tools that allow us to, for instance, consult with the community to develop policy, or receive real-time feedback on our programs and projects.

At the same time, social media presents us with new challenges in how we use, govern and moderate these platforms. Sound judgement and common sense must be applied when using social media platforms. We need to understand that material posted online effectively lasts forever, may be replicated endlessly and may reach people who were never intended as recipients. As a result, material may be misinterpreted or taken out of context. In effect, comments made via social media platforms are as public as if they were made at a public forum or, indeed, to the media. This will be the case whether you are making those comments in an official capacity (on behalf of AGD), or in a professional or personal capacity.

The objective of this policy is to balance the new opportunities presented by social media platforms against the challenges they create, by setting parameters around their use. These

parameters enable AGD to reap the benefits that social media can provide—particularly in support of 'engaged government'—while limiting the risk to AGD arising out of such use.

In meeting this objective, this policy seeks to establish a culture of openness, trust and integrity amongst AGD officers who use social media. It describes the rules, permissions and governance structures that will apply when using social media in an official capacity. It identifies and articulates your responsibilities when using social media, whether in an official, professional or personal capacity. It also describes the potential, serious consequences if you fail to comply with this policy.

This policy is an extension and application of the more general responsibilities that all staff hold as APS officers. For this reason, the policy was explicitly developed to complement the APS Values and Code of Conduct and be compatible with the Australian Public Service Commission's policies on the use of social media.

This policy should be read in concert with the social media guidance notes. These provide practical, hands-on advice to help you use various social media platforms and tools more effectively in your work.

Purpose

This policy sets out the rules, permissions, responsibilities and governance structures that apply when using social media in an **official** capacity.

It also sets out your responsibilities when using social media in a **professional** or **personal** capacity, when using departmental resources, or where you can be readily identified as either an APS officer or an AGD employee.

AGD will actively use social media platforms in an official capacity to communicate and engage with staff, stakeholders and the Australian community.

The application of this policy will:

- help you to use social media appropriately
- inform you of your responsibilities when using social media
- protect AGD's interests, and
- support the Australian Government's social media and open government agenda.

Endorsement of the policy

The Department's Executive Board has endorsed this policy.

Scope of the policy – who does it apply to and when?

The policy applies when using social media in:

- an **official** capacity (Part 1), and
- a **professional** capacity or **personal** capacity (Part 2).

This policy applies to all AGD officers, contractors, ministerial staff and any other users of the Department's network.

Definition – social media

The term 'social media' encompasses a range of relatively inexpensive and accessible web-based and mobile technologies that enable people (including private individuals and groups) to publish, access, exchange and share information through online networks. These technologies turn communication into socially interactive dialogue, as distinct from traditional, one-way channels, such as newspapers, television, and film. The key benefit of social media is its ability to facilitate interactive discussion and collaboration between communities, organisations, groups, and individuals.

Social media can be characterised by:

- online relationships
- user participation
- user-generated content
- collaboration (working together)
- multi-directional conversations
- highly accessible
- 24/7 operation and availability

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Social media may include (but is not limited to):

- social networking sites (eg Facebook, LinkedIn)
- video and photo sharing websites (eg YouTube, Flickr)
- closed communities (eg govdex)
- blogs, including corporate blogs and personal blogs (eg govspace and WordPress)
- blogs hosted by media outlets (eg 'comments' or 'your say' features on the ABC and newspaper websites)
- micro-blogging (eg Twitter)
- wikis and online collaborations (eg Wikipedia), and
- online forums, discussion boards and groups.

Compliance

Failing to comply with this policy may constitute a breach of employment or contractual obligations. Depending on the circumstance, you may be in contravention of other laws, regulations, guidelines and policies covering workplace conduct. If you fail to comply with this policy, you may face disciplinary action and, in serious cases, termination of your employment or engagement.

Identifying inappropriate use

If you notice inappropriate or unlawful content online relating to AGD, or content that may otherwise have been published in breach of this policy, you should report the circumstances via email to your Assistant Secretary or IT Security Services.

Review and evaluation

The Strategic Communication Branch and Information Division will review this policy annually to assess its operation and effectiveness. A report will be provided to the Senior Management Committee and Executive Board.

Staff may also provide feedback on the policy directly to the Strategic Communication Branch.





PART 1 – Official use of social media

Defining official use of social media

Official use of social media is defined as any use of a social media platform where your presence on that platform would be viewed as representing that of an AGD official and, accordingly, any comments you made could reasonably be viewed as representative of AGD.

Official use of social media platforms includes posting to an officially sanctioned AGD social media platform, as well as participating as a departmental representative on a third party site. Activities can include:

- establishing and maintaining a social media platform for the Department
- participating in, or moderating, online discussions
- publishing messages or comments
- uploading content (text, images, and video)
- accessing a social media platform to scan, research, or monitor comments and content provided by other stakeholders, and
- soliciting information and responding to comments from others.

Authorisation for the official use of social media

In order to use a social media platform in an official capacity you **MUST** be authorised to do so by the Strategic Communication Branch. Authorisation requires:

- a business case endorsed by an Assistant Secretary
- a communication strategy that has been endorsed by the Strategic Communication Branch and that recommends use of social media platform/s
- a social media management plan for the platform
- relevant staff to complete appropriate training, including IT Security Services training, and
- relevant staff to understand their obligations as detailed in this policy.

The Strategic Communication Branch can guide you through the process and provide practical advice on how to use social media effectively.

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PART 1 – Official use of social media

Obligations as an authorised user

When making a comment or contributing to any social media platform in an official capacity, you remain bound by the Australian Public Service (APS) Values and Code of Conduct. Accordingly, you need to fully understand the APS Values and Code of Conduct and how they apply to social media. For more information, refer to the APSC Circular 2012/1: Revisions to the Commission's guidance on making public comment and participating online.

You are expected to maintain the same high standards of conduct and behaviour online as would be expected through any other communication channel.

This includes:

- being apolitical, impartial and professional
- behaving with respect and courtesy, and without harassment
- dealing appropriately with information, recognising that some needs to remain confidential
- being sensitive to the diversity of the Australian public
- taking reasonable steps to avoid conflicts of interest, and
- making proper use of Australian Government resources.





PART 1 – Official use of social media

Once authorised to comment or use a social media platform on an official basis, you **MUST**:

- disclose you are an AGD employee/contractor when commenting on a platform
- use only an official account or a pre-approved personal identity
- disclose and comment only on information that has or can be made public—do not disclose confidential or sensitive information
- ensure you are not the first person to make a public announcement (unless specifically given permission to do so)
- ensure that all content published is accurate and not misleading and complies with all relevant departmental policies
- comment only on your area of expertise and/or authority
- ensure comments are respectful of the online community you are interacting with adhere to the terms of use of the relevant social media platform, as well as copyright, privacy, defamation, discrimination, harassment and other applicable laws and policies
- use only those social media channels that have been authorised
- ensure that you meet recordkeeping obligations, and
- inform the relevant Assistant Secretary and the Strategic Communication Branch of any significant issues, commentary or dialogue that could harm AGD's reputation, as soon as you become aware of them.

If you are authorised to comment as an AGD representative, you must **NOT**:

- post material that is offensive, obscene, defamatory, threatening, harassing, bullying, discriminatory, hateful, racist, sexist, infringes copyright, constitutes a contempt of court, breaches a court suppression order, or is otherwise unlawful
- make statements that can be viewed as political
- use or disclose any confidential or secure information, or
- make any comment or post any material that might otherwise cause damage to AGD's reputation or bring it into disrepute.

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PART 1 – Official use of social media

Commenting on social media platforms

Once authorised to use social media for official purposes, you are not required to have each comment cleared by the Strategic Communication Branch. As the authorised officer, you are responsible ensuring you have cleared comments in accordance with the social media management plan and any clearance processes set down by the appropriate Assistant Secretary. Comments and dialogue should be consistent with the key messages outlined in the communication strategy and social media management plan that were developed as part of the authorisation process.

Commenting and responding to others within social media is an official communication from AGD. It is good practice to review comments before posting them and to consider their impact on AGD, other participants and you. When deciding if and when to comment or respond, you should take into account the communication objectives, the expectations of users, any associated risks, and the time and value generated by participation.

You should be respectful, courteous and sensitive to the diversity of views and opinions presented—comments should not be argumentative. If a mistake is made and incorrect information is provided, you should seek to admit to the mistake online and correct it.

You should bear in mind that material posted online effectively lasts forever, that it may be replicated endlessly, and reach people who were never intended as recipients. As a result, material may be misinterpreted or taken out of context.

Whether commenting publicly or engaging in one-on-one dialogue with a person, you should use discretion. You should assume that any comment is being made within the public domain. (This tip equally applies when using social media for professional or personal reasons.)

Do not rely on the security settings offered by a site for a guarantee of privacy. Comments posted, even in what may appear to be a relatively secure setting, can still be copied and used elsewhere. There is no way to delete this information from the internet, even if it is deleted from the original social media platform.





PART 1 – Official use of social media

Moderating departmental social media sites

When inviting comments from the public on a website or social media platform managed by AGD, a moderation policy must be clearly set out. A privacy statement is also required.

Moderation can be in the form of pre or post moderation. As the name implies, pre-moderation allows you to consider the appropriateness of a comment before it is posted publicly to a site. Post-moderation provides the basis for removing an inappropriate public comment after it is posted. You should seek to adopt post-moderation as a default for AGD sites, unless there is a genuine need for pre-moderation. Post-moderation is less resource intensive, promotes timely posts and encourages a genuine dialogue between participants. It also reflects a confidence in, and respect for, users.

Moderation must not be seen as an opportunity to prevent comments being made publicly that differ to, or openly challenge, the official AGD position. It is important not to be overly officious. The community must feel confident that they can make comments that offer alternative opinions, views and beliefs and that these will be dealt with respectfully.

The Strategic Communication Branch can provide advice on the most appropriate form of moderation. The agreed moderation policy and practice should be built into the social media management plan.

Compliance

Failing to comply with this policy by using social media in an official capacity without authorisation, or in a manner that is contrary to the APS Code of Conduct, may constitute a breach of employment or contractual obligations.



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PART 1 – Official use of social media

Accountabilities

When using social media platforms in an official capacity, you should be aware that the following accountabilities also apply:

Information security and privacy

- Only use personal information obtained in the course of your employment/engagement with AGD in a manner consistent with the AGD ICT Security Policy (ICTSP).
- Do not publish or report on conversations or information that is deemed confidential or classified or is strictly for internal departmental purposes.
- You are not permitted to share log-ins or passwords to any authorised social media platform unless specifically authorised to do so. Passwords for the official use of social media platforms should, at minimum, meet the standard government complexity requirements, which are documented in the ICTSP. Passwords must be changed at least every 60 days.

For more information on posting material online, refer to the Information security management guidelines.

Recordkeeping

Information that provides evidence of business activity or a business decision is a Commonwealth record. A Commonwealth record may exist in any format, including emails, text messages and other digital formats. A record includes any document or information that may be requested under FOI.





PART 1 – Official use of social media

Common information about the records you are creating that may need to be captured includes:

- date of discussion or business activity—diary note
- details of your name and other stakeholders involved
- key discussion points
- details of instructions or advice provided, and
- approvals, decisions and recommendations made.

As an Australian Government department, we have an obligation to ensure that accurate and sufficient records of government business are created and kept in a useable and accessible form. Records must be kept for as long as they are required to support agencies' business, and must ensure that agencies can account for their actions under administrative law. The *Archives Act 1983* does not define a record by its format. Generally, records created as a result of using social media are subject to the same business and legislative requirements as records created by other means such as in a document or in a database, during formal or informal meetings, in emails or telephone file notes. Please refer to the National Archives of Australia website page Social Media and Commonwealth Records for more information.

Records created through the use of social media should be captured and managed in accordance with the AGD's record keeping policy. It is recommended that file notes be kept over the course of hosting and maintaining any official AGD social media platform. This includes commenting in an official capacity on social media platforms that are not- hosted by AGD.

For further advice on managing records, please refer to the Recordkeeping page on the intranet.

Copyright

You should respect copyright laws and fair use of copyrighted material. Attribute work to the original author/source wherever possible.

Freedom of information

You should be mindful that a copy of any document that AGD owns, either in hard copy or in electronic form, however created, however received or in whatever context—even in a social media context—can be requested by any person (eg journalists or even the general public), under the *Freedom of Information Act 1982*. A 'document' can include any written record, such as a blog post, an email, or Facebook message. For the document to be classed as something AGD 'owns', it generally must have been accessed or stored on a departmental computer, or contained somewhere in a location occupied by AGD.

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PART 2 – Professional and personal use of social media

Scope of the policy for professional and personal use

Professional Use: Professional use of social media is based on your area of expertise and/or association with other practitioners in that field. Accordingly, it can be related to your employment as an AGD officer (eg maintaining a professional account on LinkedIn), but you are not acting or speaking on behalf of the Department.

Personal Use: AGD defines personal use of social media as individual or private use that is not related to your employment as an AGD officer (eg having a private Facebook or Twitter account).

This policy is not designed to discourage nor unduly limit your personal expression or online activities. This policy applies to your personal and professional use of social media where:

1. You can be readily identified as an APS officer or an AGD employee – irrespective of whether you are using AGD systems.
2. You are using AGD systems for professional or personal purposes (for instance accessing LinkedIn during lunchtime) – irrespective of whether you are readily identifiable as an APS officer or an AGD employee.

Obligations as an APS/AGD officer

As private citizens, APS employees are free to embrace social media and to add their voice to the mix of opinions and comments. However, you should think carefully whether your activity can identify you as either an APS employee or an AGD employee.

You should recognise the potential for damage to be caused (either directly or indirectly) to AGD in certain circumstances via your personal use of social media when you can be identified as an AGD employee. Accordingly, you should comply with this policy to mitigate that risk.

When identifiable as an APS employee or an AGD officer, you should make it clear that you are expressing your own personal/private views. As an APS employee, it is not appropriate for you to make public comment that could be perceived as:

- being on behalf of the agency or government rather than your personal view
- compromising your capacity to fulfil your duties in an unbiased manner (particularly where comment is made about policies and programs of the Department);
- so harsh or extreme in its criticism of the government or its policies that it raises questions about your capacity to work professionally, efficiently or impartially—such comment does not have to relate to your area of work;
- so strong in its criticism of AGD’s administration that it could seriously disrupt the workplace—you should always attempt to resolve grievances by discussion with your manager or by using internal dispute resolution mechanisms
- a gratuitous personal attack, or
- compromising public confidence in the agency or the APS.



PART 2 – Professional and personal use of social media

You must at all times behave in a way that upholds the APS Values and the integrity and good reputation of the APS. Inappropriate public comment may result in sanctions under the Public Service Act 1999.

The APS Values and Code of Conduct apply to working with social media in the same way as when participating in any public forum. The requirements include:

- being apolitical, impartial and professional
- behaving with respect and courtesy, and without harassment
- dealing appropriately with information, recognising that some information needs to remain confidential
- delivering services fairly, effectively, impartially and courteously to the Australian public
- being sensitive to the diversity of the Australian public
- taking reasonable steps to avoid conflicts of interest
- making proper use of Commonwealth resources , and
- upholding the APS Values and the integrity and good reputation of the APS.

You are personally responsible for the content you publish in a personal or professional capacity on any form of social media platform. You should ensure that you fully understand the APS Values and Code of Conduct and how they apply to official, personal or professional use of social media. If in doubt about the appropriateness of your use of social media, stop and think about whether to comment and what to say, consult an SES officer, the Strategic Communication Branch or the Ethics Advisory Service in the Australian Public Service Commission.

Where your comments or profile can identify you as a public servant:

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PART 2 – Professional and personal use of social media

You **MUST**:

- only discuss publicly available information
- ensure that all content published is accurate and not misleading and complies with all relevant departmental and whole of government policies
- expressly state on all postings (identifying you as a government employee) the stated views are your own and are not those of the department or the government, and
- adhere to the terms of use of the relevant social media platform/website, as well as copyright, privacy, defamation, discrimination, harassment and other applicable laws, and the AGD Personal Information Policy.

You **MUST NOT**:

- post material that is offensive, obscene, defamatory, threatening, harassing, bullying, discriminatory, hateful, racist, sexist, infringes copyright, constitutes a contempt of court, breaches a Court suppression order, or is otherwise unlawful
- imply that you are authorised to speak as an AGD or government representative, nor give the impression that the views you express are those of AGD or the government;
- use your AGD email address nor any AGD or Government logos or insignia that may give the impression of official support or endorsement of your personal comment
- use the identity or likeness of another employee, contractor or other member of AGD
- use or disclose any confidential information obtained in your capacity as an AGD employee/contractor, and
- make any comment or post any material that might otherwise cause damage to AGD's reputation or bring it into disrepute.

Similar to the requirement under the Enterprise Agreement that you must notify your supervisor if you are working a second job, you should notify your manager of any sites or accounts you hold that may reasonably reflect on your employment in a professional capacity at AGD. You should also make it clear when making public comment in that role that you are not representing AGD or the Government. This includes formally blogging or hosting accounts on issues relevant to your area of professional expertise.



PART 2 – Professional and personal use of social media

Acceptable professional and personal use

Accessing social media through AGD systems for **professional or personal purposes** should be in accordance with the AGD ICT Security Policy. This requires you to use these resources reasonably, in a manner that does not interfere with your work and is not inappropriate or excessive. As a general rule this would limit use to time outside of working hours (eg lunchtime).

PART 2 – Professional and personal use of social media

Further information

Contact the Strategic Communication Branch for further information on 02 6141 2500.

Related documents

DEPARTMENTAL POLICIES

- Information and Communications Technology Security Policy (ICTSP)
- Record Keeping

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION

- *Freedom of Information Act 1982*

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION BRANCH

- Communication toolbox

PRIVACY

- *Privacy Act 1988*

RECOMMENDED READING

- APS Code of Conduct
- Circular 2012/1: Revisions to the Commission's guidance on making public comment and participating online
- Engage: Getting on with Government 2.0
- Social Media Security





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