



## ADMINISTRATION

*Division:* ADMINISTRATION  
*Chapter:* COMMUNICATIONS  
*Policy:* SOCIAL MEDIA  
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### I. PURPOSE

This document provides guidelines for the use of social media within the N.C. Department of Public Safety (NCDPS), in accordance with the North Carolina Office of the Governor’s [“Best Practices for Social Media Usage in North Carolina.”](#)

NCDPS recognizes that social media is an increasingly common and invaluable way to communicate with stakeholders, media, its employees and the public at large. Tools such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube and others have changed the way information is exchanged, and government entities are expected to engage the public using these Internet-based channels.

This policy establishes the following: 1) NCDPS’s position on the use of social media as part of its communication and customer service strategy; 2) guidelines, standards and expectations for the development and use of social media services in an official capacity; and 3) guidelines for employee’s personal use of social media.

These guidelines are applicable to NCDPS employees or contractors creating or contributing to blogs, microblogs, wikis, social networks, virtual worlds or any other kind of social media housed both on and off state-owned or operated servers.

Any employee or contractor who participates in social media in an official capacity on behalf of NCDPS must follow these guidelines. These guidelines will evolve as new technologies and social networking tools emerge, so any employee or contractor who participates in social media in an official capacity on behalf of NCDPS must regularly check this policy to ensure compliance with it in its current form.

### II. Social Media Defined

Social media is defined as the various activities that integrate technology, social interaction and content creation. Through social media, organizational units within NCDPS can create, organize, edit, combine and share information. Social media encompasses many forms, including social networking, blogs, wikis, photo-sharing, video-sharing and podcasts. Some examples of these social media forms include, but are not limited to, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, YouTube and LinkedIn.

Social media has changed the way most everyone communicates and works, much in the same way the Internet did in the 1990s. NCDPS supports social media use because it provides a more direct way to reach constituents and stakeholders; promotes transparency in government; fills in the gaps left by the changes in traditional media; and government agencies are expected to communicate with the public in this manner.

Social media provides a dynamic way to interact with coworkers, other government agencies, stakeholders and the public. Used correctly, mindfully and with sound judgment, it helps NCDPS and its employees build stronger, more successful relationships with citizens, employees and other governmental partners.

### iii. Preferred Social Media Tools

NCDPS will use the following preferred social media sites for outreach, marketing and overall public communication:

1. *Social Networking Platform:* Facebook (government organization page; different setup than personal page);
2. *Video Sharing:* YouTube;
3. *Photo Sharing:* Flickr and Instagram;
4. *Microblogs:* Twitter; and
5. *Blogs:* applet contained on DPS website

(NOTE: This list is subject to change, as new products become available and as the technology evolves.)

### iv. Use of Social Media to Represent NCDPS Entities

NCDPS maintains official departmental social media sites, though some of its subsidiary agencies also maintain their own separate social media sites. The Communications Office encourages subsidiary agencies to disseminate information by contributing to existing sites, as opposed to creating new social media sites. A few properly maintained sites that deliver consistently strong content are more effective than a diluted message delivered by a larger number of sites.

Subsidiary agencies seeking to create new social media sites must obtain **advance** approval from the NCDPS Communications Office as well as authorization from their leadership before launching a new site. Creation and maintenance of all authorized social media sites will be conducted as part of a communications plan and strategy.

## **v. NCDPS Communications Office Responsibilities**

The NCDPS Communications Office will:

1. Oversee decisions regarding social media sites – including authorization of new DPS-related sites – following request/approval by appropriate subsidiary agency leadership;
2. Once authorized, establish and monitor any new DPS-related site; assist in the site’s content creation to ensure that the department’s mission and message are being appropriately articulated; and assist in the site’s maintenance;
3. Verify staff who are authorized to use Department or Division social media tools, and designate appropriate access levels;
4. Maintain a list of social media domains, active account logins and passwords for every social media account authorized in NCDPS;
5. Revoke authorization of any authorized staff member found to be using an official NCDPS social media platform in an inappropriate manner;
6. Change passwords when an authorized staff member is removed as the administrator of a social media site to maintain agency control; and
7. Assign the Digital Media Manager and at least one communications officer or PIO from the Communications Office as administrators on each authorized NCDPS social media site.

## **vi. Professional Use Guidelines for Official DPS Social Media Sites**

Employees using social media to communicate on behalf of any NCDPS entity should be mindful that all statements made are on behalf of state government; therefore, employees must use discretion before posting or commenting. Once a comment or post is made, it can be seen by anyone and cannot be “taken back.” Great care will be given to monitoring communication made on behalf of NCDPS using social media, and improper use of social media tools can result in disciplinary action.

1. NCDPS social media sites must allow for public comment on the sites to promote open government, transparency, dialogue between constituents and to take full advantage of the benefits of social media. NCDPS-related communication through social media outlets must remain professional in nature and should always be conducted in accordance with the agency’s policies and expectations.
2. The NCDPS Director of Communications or designee, and, where applicable, Division leadership, must determine who is authorized to use social media on behalf of the department/division and for designating appropriate access levels to individual platforms.

3. Those authorized to post to official NCDPS social media platforms should focus on or limit postings to their area of expertise and provide unique, individual perspectives on what is going on at their divisions. In timing such posts, it is critical to remain mindful of events/incidents occurring involving NCDPS and its agencies. Those authorized to post must ensure all posts are transparent and honest, use credible sources, post only relevant information related to subjects associated with NCDPS and link back to NCDPS web pages whenever possible. Rumors or confidential information must never be posted on any official NCDPS social media platform.
4. Copyright, fair use and acceptable use laws – and appropriate records retentions schedules – must be used by those authorized to post to official NCDPS social media platforms. The unlawful use of copyrighted materials, unfounded or derogatory statements, misrepresentation, or the disclosure of confidential information can result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination.
5. It is the expectation that only meaningful, professional and respectful posts and comments will be posted and shared by those authorized to post on official NCDPS platforms. Employees authorized to post on social media must remain aware that all content they post or share on official NCDPS social media platforms serves as the public voice of the Department.
6. NCDPS reserves the right to remove any comments/postings that (i) contain anything vulgar or sexually explicit; (ii) are spam or contain computer viruses; (iii) advocate or depict illegal activity; (iv) target or disparage any ethnic, racial, religious, gender or other type of group; (v) contain libelous or personal attacks of any kind; (vi) promote private business ventures, services or products; (vii) are related to campaigns for public office or promote a political organization; (viii) infringe on copyrights, trademarks or other intellectual property; (ix) are violent or threatening; or (x) disclose confidential, sensitive or proprietary information. Site administrators should remove comments that violate these rules as soon as possible after they are noticed.
7. Staff members with administrative rights to official NCDPS social media platforms must refrain from blocking, hiding or removing from NCDPS social media sites any constitutionally protected speech, unless it is in violation of one of the exclusions listed in Section VI. If unsure how to respond to a questionable comment, staff members who are authorized to post and/or respond to comments on official NCDPS social media platforms should seek counsel from the NCDPS Communications Office immediately.
  - A. Public comments/postings that are blocked, hidden or removed from official NCDPS social media sites shall be retained pursuant to the records retention schedule along with the reason the specific content is deemed not suitable for posting.
    - i. Staff members with administrative rights to official NCDPS social media platforms are responsible for documenting blocked, hidden or removed public comments/postings from NCDPS social media sites.
    - ii. For public records retention purposes, these staff members must take a screenshot of the comment/posting and place it in an email to the NCDPS Communications Office ([ncdpscommunications@ncdps.gov](mailto:ncdpscommunications@ncdps.gov)), citing the reason the specific content is deemed unsuitable for publication on the platform.

8. When a response is appropriate, public comments to posts on official NCDPS social media platforms will be responded to in a timely manner. Employees with authorization to post official NCDPS responses must refrain from participating in arguments with visitors to NCDPS social media platforms. Responses should be appropriate, polite, respectful and informative rather than based on personal opinion. If there is any question or hesitation regarding the content of a potential comment or post, it is better not to post. Comments/postings that warrant a response will be referred to the appropriate department/division/section employee for assistance in drafting a relevant and helpful public response to share on the social media platform. Comments/postings will be monitored daily by the NCDPS Digital Media Manager and/or authorized administrators assigned to each specific NCDPS social media platform.
9. Employees authorized to post to official NCDPS social media platforms must contact the NCDPS Communications Office for guidance when responding to a sensitive or controversial post or when responding to comments that are critical of NCDPS.
10. Disclaimers addressing third-party ads and inappropriate content should be clearly visible on official sites where applicable.
11. Employees with administrative rights to official NCDPS social media sites must not use agency social media platforms for political purposes, to conduct private commercial transactions or to engage in private business activities. Official NCDPS social media sites should not comment on, “follow,” “like,” or “share” any political groups’ or figures’ profiles nor make any political comments/postings on any NCDPS social media site.

When using social media, employees who are authorized to post to an official NCDPS social media site shall not engage on any activity using the site that may create the appearance of any sort of endorsement of a private entity or business. Following a private business on Twitter, for example, could be construed as an official NCDPS endorsement of that business. Therefore, official NCDPS social media sites accounts should not comment on, “follow,” “like” or “share” private citizen or commercial profiles, unless the private citizen or commercial profiles relate directly to community service or outreach projects sponsored by or involving NCDPS, and that are appropriate to the specific social media site.

12. Employees who are authorized to post and/or administer official NCDPS social media sites should be mindful that inappropriate use of these social media sites can be grounds for disciplinary action.
13. When creating social media accounts that require individual identification, an employee should use an actual name, not a pseudonym. However, using your actual name can come with some risks. Any employee using his or her name as part of NCDPS application of social media should be mindful of the following:
  - I. Do not assume privacy. Only post information that you are comfortable disclosing.

- II. Use different passwords for different accounts (both social media and existing work accounts). Using the same password for all accounts increases the vulnerability of the accounts being compromised.
- III. A state employee should not use a current NCID password for any social media accounts, to protect the operation and integrity of the state information network.

## vii. Public Record, Records Management and Preservation

1. Communication through NCDPS-related social media is a public record under General Statute 132 and will be managed as such.
2. Comments or posts made to NCDPS division or agency account pages are public, not private. This means that both the posts of the employee administrator and any feedback by other employees or non-employees, are part of the public record.
3. Because others might not be aware of the public records law, NCDPS social media sites shall include the following statement somewhere on the social networking website:
  - a. *"This is a state government site. All posts (whether by state employee or public) are subject to monitoring and disclosure to third parties as part of N.C. Public Records Law."*
4. In the spirit of transparency in state government, an account administrator who receives a message through a private message service offered by the social media site should encourage the sender to contact the account administrator at a public email address maintained by the agency.
5. If an account administrator receives a private message, it should be treated like constituent e-mail and therefore, as a public record. The account administrator or another authorized staff member should reply using a state email account.
6. Privacy settings should be set to public.
7. The NCDPS Communications Office will ensure that the NC Department of Natural and Cultural Resources (DNCR) has current, updated lists of active account domain names of NCDPS social media sites so that DNCR can collect and archive most social networking content using an automatic web harvesting tool. NCDPS social media site administrators must not delete any information or communication threads before archival harvesting has been completed for a scheduled harvest.
  - a. If the DNCR notifies the NCDPS Communications Office that DNCR is unable to collect the content using the automatic harvesting capability, NCDPS must manually archive the public content without help from DNCR.  
See [the North Carolina Government Records' website](#).

## viii. Employee Personal Use of Social Media Guidelines

NCDPS recognizes that its employees may use social media on a personal basis outside of their professional activities and that such use includes the right to exercise freedom of speech. These sites should remain personal. Employees must not conduct NCDPS business by way of any personal account.

- NCDPS employees must use good judgment when posting to a social media site as a private citizen, especially if the employee refers to anything related to NCDPS business. This helps to ensure a distinction between personal and agency views. Employees must be mindful that they could blur the lines between their personal and professional lives when using social media. Even when acting away from the office in a private capacity, an employee must remember that he or she may be perceived by the public as representing the agency and state government as a whole when discussing NCDPS activities.
- A NCDPS employee who posts work-related information on a personal social media site is still subject to the terms of this policy. Employees must clearly label and distinguish a personal opinion when it is publicly stated about NCDPS-related matters. Personal use related to a matter of public concern must be conducted in such a manner that a reader would not think the employee is speaking on behalf of NCDPS.
- When in doubt, stop. Add a disclaimer to your social networking profile, personal blog or other online presences that clearly states that the opinions or views expressed are yours alone and do not represent the views of NCDPS or your agency.

*Example: "The views expressed on this page are my own and do not necessarily represent the position or opinion of NCDPS or the divisions within."*

- In a publicly accessible forum, the discussion of sensitive, proprietary or classified information is strictly prohibited. Please act responsibly with the information with which you are entrusted. Failure to comply may result in disciplinary action.
- Employees must not use their state e-mail account or password in conjunction with a personal social networking site.
- Employees may use personal social media platforms for limited personal communications while at work. Those communications should occur on break times and must not interfere with their work.