

## 6.9 Social Media Policy

### Policy Statement

It is the policy of the Government of Nova Scotia to encourage clear and effective communication with all Nova Scotians using a variety of accepted tools, including social media. Social media is helping government share important information with Nova Scotians. Our citizens are online and they expect us to be there with them. The civil service has been challenged to be more innovative and creative – to go beyond conventional thinking when it comes to our programs, services and the way in which they are delivered. Like other forms of communication, government use of social media must meet tests of credibility, privacy, authority and accountability.

### Definitions

#### **EMPLOYEE**

An employee as defined in the *Civil Service Act*, the *Highway Workers' Collective Bargaining Act*, and any other person directly employed by the Province of Nova Scotia.

This definition includes those who undertake work for government departments while under contract with the Government of Nova Scotia.

#### **DEPARTMENT**

Any government department, office, or public service entity listed in Category I of Appendix I-A, Corporate Administrative Policy Manual 100, Chapter I, Policy 1.2 Corporate Administrative Policy Manuals Policy.

#### **SOCIAL MEDIA**

Social media means the online technologies and practices that are used to share stories, information, opinions, host conversations and build relationships. It can involve a variety of formats, including text, pictures, video, audio and real-time dialogues. It includes, but is not exclusive to, such things as social networks, discussion forums, blogs, wikis and podcasts. Examples of current social media channels include Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. However, social media tools do not focus on a specific technology but on a new, more interactive way of using the Internet.

**MODERATED**

Blogs, discussion forums or other social media initiated and/or created by, and within the control of Government, must be moderated. Moderated means regular technical and monitoring measures that prevent, or ensure the timely removal of, any defamatory or objectionable submissions, including information that jeopardizes the privacy of others.

**OFFICIAL USE**

Official use means use for Government of Nova Scotia purposes such as communication, service delivery, collaboration and other purposes within the scope of a department's mandate, including as a designated spokesperson for the department or by an individual performing activities as a part of official duties.

**PERSONAL USE**

Personal use means use by an employee for purposes unrelated to official use.

**REASONABLE COMMUNICATIONS PRACTICES**

Reasonable communications practices include practices that help assess appropriateness and possible alternatives, potential audience, the costs and benefits to the Nova Scotia economy and to the health, safety and well-being of Nova Scotians, public service needs, and other factors associated with a communication plan prepared by Communications Nova Scotia staff.

**Policy Objectives**

The objectives of this policy are to:

- Support social media use in communicating overall government themes and policies, providing citizens with better access to government programs and services and more choice about how, when and where to access those services;
- Enable Government to be more active in its relationships with citizens, partners and stakeholders;
- Encourage the appropriate, creative and effective official and professional use of social media by Government employees for Government purposes
- Encourage the appropriate personal use of social media by Government employees
- Provide a framework for the application of the Policies and Guidelines that oversee social media use, such as the Guidelines for Employees' Use of Social Media (Appendix 6-B)

- Ensure the use of social media by Government employees complies with all applicable laws, and all Government of Nova Scotia policies and procedures, including those related to protection of privacy, capture and retention of records, security, respectful workplaces, employee code of conduct, conflict of interest and Internet/e-mail use.

## Policy Application

This policy applies to all civil servants whose terms and conditions are set out in accordance with the *Civil Service Act* and regulations and other direct employees of the provincial government including all bargaining unit employees. This policy also applies to those who undertake work for government departments while under contract with the Government of Nova Scotia.

Independent or arm's length agencies are not covered under this policy but are encouraged to follow the principles of this policy.

## Policy Directives

- All Government employees using social media shall follow the Guidelines for Employees' Use of Social Media.
- Employees shall not make partisan, political comments while speaking or writing as a government employee. Comments must be objective in nature. Do not refer or link to the websites or social media accounts of politicians or political parties.
- Be transparent. If using social media in an official capacity, or about something connected to your job or the work of your department, you should identify yourself as a government employee and your area of expertise.
- Personal social media accounts shall not be used to conduct official Government business.
- The decision to create or initiate new Government social media accounts must be approved by Communications Nova Scotia, as the government's central agency for the management and delivery of communications services. Approval shall be based on an appropriate assessment of risk, particularly with respect to privacy and network security. In assessing risk, CNS will undertake consultations as required.
- Privacy breaches that may occur are the responsibility of the departments in which they originate and must be reported in accordance with legislation and policy.
- Blogs, discussion forums or other social media initiated and/or created by, and within the control of, Government must be moderated.

- Government-hosted social media services must include Terms of Use Guidelines for users.
- Government employees using any social media shall be governed by the Government of Nova Scotia's Values, Ethics, & Conduct: A Code for Nova Scotia's Public Servants, and all Government of Nova Scotia laws, policies and procedures affecting conflict of interest, protection of privacy, records capture and retention, intellectual property and website/Internet use.
- As per HR policy, disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal, could result from a failure to follow these requirements.

## **Accountability**

### **ALL GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES**

- Government employees are responsible for understanding and following all Government policies affecting official and personal use of social media, including but not exclusive to the Guidelines for Employees' Use of Social Media, Government of Nova Scotia's Values, Ethics, & Conduct: A Code for Nova Scotia's Public Service, Conflict of Interest policies and procedures, and all Government of Nova Scotia policies and procedures affecting protection of privacy, records capture and retention and website/Internet use.

### **MANAGEMENT**

- Management is responsible for ensuring that all employees are advised of the Guidelines for Employees' Use of Social Media; ensuring that social media services initiated and/or created by and within the control of Government are moderated; ensuring that appropriate Terms of Use Guidelines are posted, whenever possible, for all Government-operated social media initiatives; ensuring that appropriate records management policies are followed for all Government-operated social media initiatives.

### **DEPUTY HEAD**

- The deputy head is responsible for ensuring implementation of and compliance with the policy.

### **COMMUNICATIONS NOVA SCOTIA**

- Communications Nova Scotia is responsible for assessing and granting approval of all new external social media initiated or created by Government.
- Communications Nova Scotia will determine that each new social media endeavor initiated or created by Government has plans that are based on reasonable

communications practices and include technical and monitoring measures which prevent, or ensure the timely removal of, any defamatory or objectionable submissions, including information that jeopardizes the privacy of others.

- Communications Nova Scotia is responsible for creating the criteria required for moderation of social media.

## Monitoring

Communications Nova Scotia, in co-operation with the Chief Information Office and the Public Service Commission, will monitor and update this policy annually.

## References

- *Public Service Act* (amended)
- 6.1 Communications Policy/Protocol
- Guidelines for Employees' Use of Social Media
- Criteria for Moderating Social Media
- Nova Scotia Government Terms of Use
- Conflict of Interest Policy
- Values, Ethics and Conduct: A Code for Nova Scotia's Public Servants
- Respectful Workplace Policy
- *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* and regulations
- Government Internet Policy
- Website Design and Content Standards
- Electronic Mail Policy Website
- Privacy Policy
- Information Management Policy
- *Government Records Act* and Records Management Policy
- *Personal Information, International Disclosure Protection Act*
- *Personal Health Information Act*
- *Cyber-Safety Act*
- WAN Security Policy
- Mobile Wireless Device Policy

## Enquiries

Acting Director, Policy and Corporate Services  
Communications Nova Scotia  
(902) 722-1370

---

Approval date: ***July 22, 2010***

Approved by: ***Executive Council***

Effective date: ***September 1, 2010***

Administrative update: ***May 20, 2014***

---

## Appendix 6-B

# Guidelines for Employees' Use of Social Media

Nova Scotia government employees use the Internet in the course of their work as well as during their private time. Social media – blogs, public wikis and social networking sites such as Facebook – provide useful means for employees to communicate with citizens, community partners and each other.

Social media is helping government share important information with Nova Scotians. Our citizens are online and they expect us to be there with them. The civil service has been challenged to be more innovative and creative – to go beyond conventional thinking when it comes to our programs, services and the way in which they are delivered. Like other forms of communication, government use of social media must meet tests of credibility, privacy, authority and accountability.

The following guidelines are meant to assist government employees in making appropriate, responsible use of social media at home and at work.

### **What is social media?**

Social media means the online technologies and practices that are used to share stories, information, opinions, host conversations and build relationships. It can involve a variety of formats, including text, pictures, video, audio and real-time dialogues. It includes, but is not exclusive to, such things as social networks, discussion forums, blogs, wikis and podcasts. Examples of current social media channels include Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. However, social media tools do not focus on a specific technology but on a new, more interactive way of using the Internet.

### **Benefits of social media**

Social media tools present exciting opportunities for communication and engagement between government and the public. Social media can help government to better understand, respond to, and attract the attention of specific audiences. It enables interactive communication – the exchange of information, perspective and opinion – among multiple audiences, in an effective and efficient manner, and in places where those conversations are already taking place.

**Social media can:**

- Provide citizens with better access to government services and more choice about how, when and where to access those services;
- Improve government's ability to reach audiences and improve the accessibility of communication and engagement efforts;
- Enable government to be more active in its relationships with citizens, partners and stakeholders;
- Offer greater scope to adjust or refocus communications quickly, when necessary;
- Enhance the credibility of government initiatives or proposals through non-government channels;
- Increase the speed of public feedback and input, providing citizens with greater responsiveness and input to decisions;
- Reach specific audiences on specific issues; and
- Expand government's media channels.

**Official Use of Social Media**

Government can make use of social media in two ways:

- by contributing to existing platforms operated by outside organizations or individuals, or
- by establishing its own discussion forums or other online communication platforms. These may be ongoing or may be established for a specific time-limited proposal or initiative. They may be open to the public or access may be confined to a particular group of stakeholders.

When considering launching a social media initiative, managers and employees should be clear about the purpose and the resource implications that maintaining and monitoring the effort will entail. Any work-related, external social media initiative must be approved by the employee's immediate manager or supervisor and the Director of Communications. Communications Nova Scotia is responsible for assessing and granting approval of all new external social media initiated or created by Government, ensuring appropriate corporate and senior management awareness and agreement with the initiative.

Social media should support communications and departmental objectives in a positive, measurable way. The use of social media should address a need; social media use is not necessarily suitable in all situations.



**Moderating**

Blogs, discussion forums or other social media initiated and/or created by and within the control of Government, must be moderated. One or more site administrators or editors must be designated to moderate the site or social media service. Posts will, with rare exceptions, appear as they are submitted. Generally, whether it is positive or negative towards the government or whether you agree with it or not, if the user generated content is in context and respectful it should not be removed. However, inappropriate material should be removed as soon as it is discovered.

**Guiding Principles for Employees' Use of Social Media**

Whether social media is used for official or personal purposes, Government's Code of Conduct (Values, Ethics, & Conduct: A Code for Nova Scotia's Public Servants), as well as policies governing Conflict of Interest, Respectful Workplace, and Privacy policies and applicable laws apply to on-line communication as fully as they do to activities in any other circumstance or venue.

**CONFIDENTIALITY**

Confidentiality is covered under "Integrity" in Values, Ethics, & Conduct: A Code for Nova Scotia's Public Servants, (<http://www.gov.ns.ca/psc/v2/about/overview/publicationsPolicies/codeofconduct/>) but it's worth special mention here. Many of us are privy to confidential and sometimes sensitive information in our work. It is every bit as important to protect confidential information when posting comments online as anywhere else.

**PROFESSIONALISM**

Social media is a more casual way of communicating so, by all means, be conversational online. But if you're participating as a government employee, don't compromise on professionalism.

Employees who engage in social media must:

- Always maintain a respectful, constructive tone.
- Always provide accurate and clear information that cannot be easily misinterpreted, and refrain from debates over matters of strict opinion.
- Never launch personal attacks or make defamatory or offensive statements, such as those that might constitute harassment, sexual harassment or discrimination.

- Never make partisan, political comments while speaking as a government employee. Comments must be objective in nature. Do not refer or link to the websites or social media accounts of politicians or political parties.
- Never criticize policies of the government
- Always maintain the integrity and values of a Nova Scotia' Government employee.

**SELF-IDENTIFICATION**

Be transparent. If you want to speak or write online in an official capacity, or about something connected with your job or the work of your department – even something as simple as to correct a mistake made by someone else – you should identify yourself as a government employee, and your area of expertise. Doing so will probably add a little more weight to what you say in your post; more importantly, though, it will prevent situations from developing where you, or the province, could be accused of covertly attempting to influence free discussion.

If you are expressing your personal opinion, you do not need to self-identify, unless it is necessary in order to ensure that it is clear your views are not intended to represent those of government. Use caution when sharing or re-tweeting content that you didn't create that could be considered partisan in nature.

**AUTHORIZATION**

Before granting an interview to a reporter or agreeing to appear on the evening news, you are required to make contact with your department Media Relations Advisor or Communications Director to discuss the request. The same policy applies to online communications. If you are thinking about posting to a social media site on a work-related matter, discuss the matter with Communications Nova Scotia staff first.

**RECORDS MANAGEMENT**

When engaging in interactive communication on social media, and it becomes apparent that the conversation should be captured for records management purposes, invite the participant to continue the conversation via Direct Message or email. This will ensure the conversation is captured appropriately and according to government Records Management policy.

## Personal Use of Social Media

### DURING WORK HOURS

Some government employees have legitimate, business-related reasons to make use of social media in the course of doing their jobs; others do not. It's not appropriate for anybody to be regularly updating their Facebook status, or otherwise spending significant amounts of time with social activity when they're on the job. Your personal use of social media should not interfere with your work commitments. You should also adhere to policies governing acceptable use, which provide guidance on the personal use of work-related resources.

### OUTSIDE OF WORK HOURS

As a citizen, as well as an employee, you can, of course, use social media in all the same ways as anyone else outside of work hours. As a private citizen, when engaging in social media activities, Nova Scotia Government employees must use a private email address rather than their provincial government email address. It is important to recognize that what you publish on the Internet may be damaging to your employer, either directly or indirectly. If you publish inappropriate comments that are harassing to your co-workers or reflect badly on your employer, even if it is in your personal space, on your personal time, disciplinary action could follow.

### Consider the following when using social media for personal purposes:

- Don't share government material in a personal space. Keep your personal online presence and your work online presence separate. Do not use any Nova Scotia provincial government branding that implies that you are representing the government;
- Use a disclaimer anywhere there may be uncertainty about the capacity in which you are acting. A disclaimer, such as: "The postings on this site are my own and do not represent the views or opinions of my employer" can help protect you;
- Recognize that anything posted on the Internet is there indefinitely and available to a wide audience, including your colleagues and managers. Even if you attempt to delete the post, photo, comment, etc., it is likely that it has been stored in any number of other places. Content posted to the Internet should be thought of as permanent;
- Respect intellectual property rights, including but not limited to, copyright and fair use;
- Seek guidance from your manager or supervisor, or Communications Nova Scotia, on how to comply with obligations around personal use.

**Note:** A disclaimer does not by itself exempt you from responsibility when posting online. By virtue of your position, you should consider whether personal thoughts you publish may be misunderstood as expressing the positions or opinions of the Government of Nova Scotia. Therefore, caution is advisable. Consult with your manager or supervisor, or a Communications Director when in doubt.

**COMPLIANCE**

Some types of personal use can result in discipline, up to and including dismissal, if they are damaging to the Government's reputation or inconsistent with your work obligations. This is true, even when done on your personal time, on your own computer, and on websites that are unrelated to your workplace.

**Examples include:**

- Violation of confidentiality requirements by disclosing information or posting photographs relating to Government, your co-workers or members of the public;
- Making insulting or threatening comments about your workplace that could damage relationships and disrupt the workplace;
- Breaking the law (e.g., the Criminal Code); and
- Posting racist, discriminatory or violent comments.

If you become aware of social media content posted by a Government employee that does not comply with the Social Media Policy or these Guidelines, you should report it to your manager, supervisor or Communications Director.