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| LEESBURG POLICE DEPARTMENT REGULATIONS AND GENERAL ORDERS MANUAL | | |
| General Order Number: 128 | Section: ADMINISTRATION | Effective Date: MARCH 2026 |
| Title: SOCIAL MEDIA | | |
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I. PURPOSE

The Leesburg Police Department supports the secure and responsible use of social media to enhance communication, collaboration, and the exchange of information with the public and within the organization. Social media platforms can improve transparency, streamline communication processes, and support the department’s mission of serving the community.

This policy establishes the department’s position on the use and management of social media and guides its administration, oversight, and appropriate use. This policy is intended to address social media in general and is not limited to any specific platform, recognizing that technology continues to evolve and new tools and platforms will emerge.

II. POLICY

Social media provides a valuable tool to assist the department and its personnel in achieving community outreach, problem-solving, investigative, crime prevention, and other law enforcement-related objectives. This policy identifies potential uses that may be explored or expanded upon as deemed reasonable by administrative and supervisory personnel.

The department also recognizes the role that these tools play in the personal lives of some department personnel. The personal use of social media can have an impact on departmental personnel in their official capacity and the public’s perception of the department. As such, this policy provides information of a precautionary nature as well as prohibitions on the use of social media by department personnel.

III. DEFINITIONS

- A. **Blog:** A self-published diary or commentary on a particular topic that may allow visitors to post responses, reactions, or comments. The term is short for “Web Log.”
- B. **Page:** The specific portion of a social media website where content is displayed and managed by an individual or individuals with administrator rights.
- C. **Post:** Content an individual shares on a social media site or the act of publishing content on a site.
- D. **Profile:** Information that a user provides about themselves on a social networking site.
- E. **Social Media:** A category of Internet-based resources that integrate user-generated content and user participation. This includes, but is not limited to, social networking sites (Facebook, Twitter), micro-blogging sites (Instagram), and photograph and video-sharing sites (Snapchat, YouTube).
- F. **Social Networks:** Online platforms where users can create profiles, share information, and socialize with others using a wide range of technologies.
- G. **Speech:** Expression or communication of thoughts or opinions in spoken words, in writing, by expressive conduct, symbolism, photographs, videotape, or related forms of communication.

IV. ON-THE-JOB USE

A. Department-Sanctioned Presence.

1. Determine strategy.
 - a. Where possible, each social media page shall include an introductory statement that clearly specifies the purpose and scope of the agency's presence on the website.
 - b. Where possible, the page(s) should link to the department's official website.
 - c. Social media page(s) shall be designed for the target audience(s), such as youth, police volunteers, or potential police recruits.
2. Procedures.
 - a. All department social media sites or pages shall be approved by the Chief of Police, or his/her designee, and shall be administered by the department's Public Information Officer.
 - b. Where possible, social media pages shall clearly indicate they are maintained by the police department and shall have department contact information prominently displayed.
 - c. Social media content shall adhere to applicable laws, regulations, and policies, including all information technology and records management policies.
 - (1) Content is subject to public records laws. Relevant records retention schedules apply to social media content.
 - (2) Content must be managed, stored, and retrieved to comply with open records laws, e-discovery laws, and policies.
 - d. The Leesburg Police Department has disabled public commenting on its Meta platforms (Facebook and Instagram) as well as X due to ongoing scam and automated bot activity within comment sections that has included fraudulent links and impersonation attempts. This measure is intended to protect community members and maintain the integrity of information shared by the department.
 - (1) While comments are disabled on these platforms, direct messaging through social media accounts remains available and is not affected by this change.
 - (2) Community members may also contact the department through emergency and non-emergency phone numbers, the department website, or other official communication channels.
 - e. Where comments are permitted on other department-approved social media platforms, pages shall clearly indicate that the opinions expressed by visitors do not reflect the opinions of the Leesburg Police Department.
 - (1) Pages shall indicate that comments may be monitored and that the department reserves the right to remove content containing obscenities, off-topic remarks, racial or ethnic slurs, personal attacks, or other content that violates platform rules or department policies.
 - (2) Pages shall indicate that any content posted or submitted for posting may be subject to public disclosure.
3. Department-Sanctioned Use.
 - a. The Department's Public Information Officer representing the Department via social media outlets shall do the following:
 - (1) Conduct themselves at all times as representatives of the department and, accordingly, shall adhere to all department standards of conduct and observe conventionally accepted protocols and proper decorum.
 - (2) Identify themselves as members of the Leesburg Police Department.
 - (3) Do not make statements about the guilt or innocence of any suspect or arrestee, or comments concerning pending prosecutions, nor post, transmit, or otherwise disseminate confidential information, including photographs or videos related to department training, activities, or work-related assignments without permission from the Chief of Police or designee.
 - (4) Not conduct political activities or private business on department-sanctioned social media.
 - (5) Posts shall be limited to incidents occurring within the Town of Leesburg to avoid any misinformation or confusion, as well as guidance for coordination purposes with neighboring law enforcement agencies when a crossover occurs.
 - b. While on duty, the use of department computers by department personnel to access social media is prohibited without authorization.

B. Potential Uses.

1. Social media is a valuable investigative tool when seeking evidence or information about, but not limited to, the following:
 - a. Missing persons;
 - b. Wanted persons;
 - c. Gang participation;
 - d. Crimes perpetrated online (i.e., cyber-bullying, cyber-stalking); and
 - e. Photos or videos of a crime posted by a participant or observer.
2. Social media can be used for community outreach and engagement by:
 - a. Providing crime prevention tips;
 - b. Offering online-reporting opportunities;
 - c. Sharing crime maps and data; and
 - d. Soliciting tips about unsolved crimes (i.e., Crime Line, Inc.).
3. Social media can be used to make time-sensitive notifications related to:
 - a. Road closures;
 - b. Special events;
 - c. Weather emergencies;
 - d. Missing or endangered persons and;
 - e. Other police emergencies.
4. Persons seeking employment and volunteer positions use the Internet to search for opportunities, and social media can be a valuable recruitment tool.
5. The Leesburg Police Department has an obligation to include Internet-based content when conducting background investigations of job candidates.
 - a. Searches should be conducted by a non-decision maker in the hiring process.
 - b. Information pertaining to protected classes shall be filtered out before sharing any information found online with employment decision makers.
 - c. Persons authorized to search Internet-based content should be deemed as holding a sensitive position.
 - d. Search methods shall not involve techniques that are a violation of existing law.
 - e. Vetting techniques shall be applied uniformly to all candidates.
 - f. Every effort must be made to validate Internet-based information considered during the hiring process.

V. PERSONAL USE

A. Precautions and Prohibitions

Barring state law or binding employment contracts to the contrary, Leesburg Police Department personnel shall abide by the following when using social media.

1. Department personnel are free to express themselves as private citizens on social media platforms to the extent that such speech does not impair working relationships within the department where loyalty, discipline, and confidentiality are required; impede the performance of duties; disrupt harmony among coworkers; or negatively affect the public perception of the department.
2. As public employees, department personnel are advised that speech made while on-duty or off-duty, when made pursuant to their official duties—that is, speech that owes its existence to the employee's professional responsibilities—is not protected by the First Amendment and may form the basis for discipline if deemed detrimental to the department. Personnel should assume that their speech and related activity on social media may reflect upon their office and the Leesburg Police Department.
3. Department personnel shall not post, transmit, or otherwise disseminate any information obtained through their employment without written authorization from the Chief of Police or the Chief's designee.
4. For safety and security reasons, department personnel are cautioned against disclosing their employment with the Leesburg Police Department on social media platforms. Personnel shall not post information about any other member of the department without that individual's permission.
 - a. Officers who are assigned to, or may reasonably be expected to work in, undercover operations shall not post any form of visual or personal identification.
5. When using social media, department personnel should be mindful that their speech may become publicly accessible worldwide. Accordingly, adherence to the department's Code of Conduct is required when engaging in personal use of social media. Department personnel are prohibited from the following:

- a. Posting speech containing obscene or sexually explicit language, images, or acts, or statements that ridicule, malign, disparage, or otherwise express bias against any race, religion, or other protected class of individuals.
 - b. Posting content involving themselves or other department personnel that reflects behavior that would reasonably be considered reckless, irresponsible, or unbecoming of a department employee.
6. Engaging in prohibited speech as outlined above may provide grounds for undermining or impeaching an officer's testimony in criminal proceedings. Personnel engaging in prohibited speech may be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including termination.
 7. Department personnel shall not divulge information obtained by virtue of their authority, nor make statements, speeches, appearances, endorsements, or publish materials that could reasonably be interpreted as representing the views or position of the Leesburg Police Department without express authorization.
 8. Department personnel should be aware that their actions on social media may expose them to civil liability, including but not limited to:
 - a. Publishing or posting false statements that harm the reputation of another person, group, or organization (defamation);
 - b. Publishing or posting private facts or personal information about an individual without their permission that has not been previously revealed to the public, is not of legitimate public concern, and would be offensive to a reasonable person;
 - c. Using another individual's name, likeness, or personal attributes without permission for exploitative purposes; or
 - d. Publishing the creative work of another, including trademarks or certain confidential business information, without the permission of the owner.
 9. Department personnel should recognize that privacy settings and social media platforms are constantly evolving. Personnel should never assume that personal information posted on social media is private or protected.
 10. Department personnel should expect that any information created, transmitted, downloaded, exchanged, or discussed in a public online forum may be accessed by the department at any time without prior notice.
- B. Reporting violations.
- Any employee becoming aware of or having knowledge of any posting, website, or web page in violation of the provisions of this policy shall notify his or her supervisor immediately for follow-up action.