



Seattle Police Department Policy Manual



5.125 – Social Media

Effective Date: 07/01/2019

Social media refers to digital communication platforms that integrate user-generated content and user participation. This includes, but is not limited to, social networking sites, microblogging sites, photo and video sharing sites, wikis, blogs, and news sites. Some examples of social media include:

- Facebook
- Twitter
- Instagram
- YouTube
- Reddit
- Tumblr

These policies address the use of social media in general and not one particular form.

5.125-POL-1 Department Use of Social Media

The Department endorses the secure use of social media as described below to enhance community engagement, information distribution, and neighborhood safety.

1. The Chief of Police Approves Official Department Social Media Accounts

Exception: This approval requirement does not apply to the Director of the Office of Police Accountability (OPA) or the OPA staff acting under the authority of the OPA Director. However, this exception does not relieve the Director of the obligation to obtain approval from the Mayor's communications director per City policy.

2. Public Affairs Will Oversee all Official Department Social Media Accounts

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3. The Department Will Clearly Identify its Official Social Media Accounts

Where possible, Department social media accounts shall prominently display the following information and/or statements:

- Department contact information and a link to the Department website
- That pages are maintained by the Department
- The purpose and scope of the Department's presence on the websites
- That the opinions expressed by visitors to the pages do not reflect the opinions of the Department
- That posted comments will be monitored and that the Department reserves the right to remove comments at its discretion such as obscenities, off-topic comments, personal attacks, any comments that jeopardize an ongoing investigation or prosecution, or that otherwise impair the Department's ability to provide effective law enforcement services to the community.
- That any content posted or submitted for posting is subject to public disclosure

4. Employees May Use Non-Official Social Media Accounts for Investigations

Any employees using non-official social media accounts for investigative purposes will obtain written permission from the Chief of Police, regardless of duty assignment.

These employees will maintain a log of all social media postings to non-official accounts.

5. Social Media Content is Subject to Information Technology and Records Management Laws and Policies

The City of Seattle Department of Information Technology stores and retains content from official Department social media accounts in compliance with open records laws and policies.

5.125-POL-2 Employee Personal Use of Social Media

This policy covers employee personal use of social media affecting the workplace and/or the Department's ability to perform its public mission.

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The Department recognizes the role that social media plays in the personal lives of some Department employees. However, the personal use of social media can have bearing on employees in their official capacity as they are held to a high standard by the community.

Engaging in prohibited speech outlined in this policy may provide grounds for discipline and may be used to undermine or impeach an officer's testimony in legal proceedings.

1. Employees Shall Not Post Speech That Negatively Impacts the Department's Ability to Serve the Public

Employees may express themselves as private citizens on social media sites as long as employees do not:

- Make, share, or comment in support of any posting that includes harassment, threats of violence, or similar conduct
- Make, share, or comment in support of any posting that ridicules, maligns, disparages, expresses bias, or disrespect toward any race, religion, sex, gender, sexual orientation, nationality, or any other protected class of individuals
- Make, share, or comment in support of any posting that suggests that Department personnel are engaged in behavior reasonably considered to be unlawful or reckless toward public safety
- Otherwise violate any law or SPD policy

Employees shall make reasonable efforts to remove content appearing on their social media account that violates this policy upon learning of the offensive content.

2. Employees May Not Post Privileged Information or Represent the Department

Employees shall not post or otherwise disseminate any confidential information they have access to as a result of their employment with the Department.

Employees may not make any statements, appearances, endorsements, or publish materials that could reasonably be considered to represent the views or positions of the Department.

Exception: This section does not apply to the personnel outlined in Manual section [1.110 – Public Information](#).

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3. Employees May Not Use Their City Email Address to Register a Personal Account on Social Media

Employees shall refer to [Manual section 12.110](#) regarding personal use of City-owned equipment and devices to access the internet and email.