

CITY OF ASHLAND SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

This policy statement and the procedures thereunder are intended for the City of Ashland use only. Violations of City policies, procedures, regulations, or standards of conduct form the basis for disciplinary action.

PURPOSE

The City of Ashland endorses the secure use of social media to enhance communication, collaboration, and information exchange; streamline processes; and foster productivity. This policy establishes the City's position on the utility and management of social media and provides guidance on its management administration, and oversight. This policy is not meant to address one particular form of social media, rather social media in general, as advances in technology will occur and new tools will emerge.

POLICY:

Social media provides a new and potentially valuable means of assisting the division and its personnel in meeting community outreach, problem-solving, investigative, and related objectives. This policy identifies potential uses that may be explored or expanded upon as deemed reasonable by administrative and supervisory personnel. The City also recognizes the role that these tools play in the personal lives of some of the employees. The personal use of social media can have bearing on City employees in their official capacity. As such, this policy provides information of a precautionary nature as well as prohibitions on the use of social media by City employees.

DEFINITIONS:

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."

Page: The specific portion of a social media website where content is displayed, and managed by an individual or individuals with administrator rights.

Post: Content an individual shares on a social media site or the act of publishing content on a site.

Profile: Information that a user provides about himself or herself on a social networking site.

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, MySpace, Google+), microblogging sites (Twitter, Nixle), photo and video sharing sites (Flickr, YouTube), wikis (Wikipedia), blogs, and news sites (Digg, Reddit).

Social Networks: Online platforms where users can create profiles, share information, and socialize with others using a range of technologies.

Speech: Expression or communication of thoughts or opinions in spoken words, in writing, by expressive conduct, symbolism, photographs, videotape, or related forms of communication.

Web 2.0: The second generation of the World Wide Web focused on shareable, user-generated content, rather than static web pages. Some use this term interchangeably with social media.

Wiki: Web page(s) that can be edited collaboratively.

ON-THE-JOB USE

A. City-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 City's presence on the website.

b. Where possible, the page(s) should link to the City's official website.

c. Social media page(s) shall be designed for the target audience(s).

2. Procedures

a. All City social media sites or pages shall be approved by the Division Director or Appointing Authority or his/her designee

and shall be administered by the the assigned employee or as otherwise determined.

b. Where possible, social media pages shall clearly indicate they are maintained by the specific division and shall have division 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 and e-discovery laws and policies.

d. Where possible, social media pages should state that the opinions expressed by visitors to the page(s) do not reflect the opinions of the division.

(1)Pages shall clearly indicate that posted comments will be monitored and that the City reserves the right to remove obscenities, off-topic comments, and personal attacks.

(2)Pages shall clearly indicate that any content posted or submitted for posting is subject to public disclosure.

3. Division-Sanctioned Use

a. Employees representing the division via social media outlets shall do the following:

(1)Conduct themselves at all times as representatives of the division and accordingly, shall adhere to all division standards of conduct and observe

conventionally accepted protocols and proper decorum.

(2)Identify themselves as a member of the specific division.

(3)Not make statements about the guilt or innocence of any suspect or arrestee, or comments concerning pending prosecutions or investigations, nor post, transmit, or otherwise disseminate confidential information, including photographs or videos, related to department training, activities, or work-related assignments without express permission.

(4)Not conduct political activities or private business.

b. The use of City owned computers by employees to access social media is prohibited without authorization.

c. Use of personally owned devices to administer the City's social media activities or in the course of official duties is prohibited without express written permission.

d. Employees shall observe and abide by all copyright, trademark, and service mark restrictions in posting materials to electronic media.

B. Potential Uses

1. Social media is a valuable investigative tool when seeking evidence or information about:

- 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, fire prevention and safety tips;
 - b. offering online-reporting opportunities;
 - c. sharing maps and data; and
 - d. soliciting tips about unsolved crimes (i.e., Crimestoppers, text-a-tip).
3. Social media can be used to make time-sensitive notifications related to:
- a. road closures,
 - b. special events,
 - c. weather emergencies, and
 - d. missing or endangered persons.
4. Persons seeking employment and volunteer positions use the Internet to search for opportunities, and social media can be a valuable recruitment mechanism.
5. This City has an obligation to include Internet-based content when conducting background investigations of job candidates.
6. Searches should be conducted by a nondecision maker. Information pertaining to protected classes shall be filtered out prior to sharing any information found online with decision makers.
7. Persons authorized to search Internet-based content should be deemed as holding a sensitive position.
8. Search methods shall not involve techniques that are a violation of existing law.
9. Vetting techniques shall be applied uniformly to all candidates.
10. Every effort must be made to validate Internet based information considered during the hiring process.

PERSONAL USE

A. Precautions and Prohibitions

Barring state law or binding employment contracts to the contrary, City employees shall abide by the following when using social media.

1. Employees are free to express themselves as private citizens on social media sites to the degree that their speech does not impair working relationships of the City for which loyalty and confidentiality are important, impede the performance of duties, impair discipline and harmony among co-

workers, or negatively affect the public perception of the City.

2. As public employees, division personnel are cautioned that speech on- or off-duty, made pursuant to their official duties—that is, that owes its existence to the employee’s professional duties and responsibilities—is not protected speech under the First Amendment and may form the basis for discipline if deemed detrimental to the division. Employees should assume that their speech and related activity on social media sites would reflect upon their office and the division.

3. Employees shall not post, transmit, or otherwise disseminate any information to which they have access as a result of their employment without written permission from the Appointing Authority or his/her designee.

4. For safety and security reasons, employees are cautioned not to disclose their employment with the City or division nor shall they post information pertaining to any other member of the City or division without their permission. As such, employees are cautioned not to do the following:

- a. Display division logos, uniforms, or similar identifying items on personal web pages.
- b. Post personal photographs or provide similar means of personal recognition that may cause them to be identified as a City employee. Officers who are, or who may reasonably be expected to work in undercover operations, shall not post any form of visual or personal identification.

5. When using social media, City employees should be mindful that their speech becomes part of the worldwide electronic domain. Therefore, adherence to the City’s code of conduct is required in the personal use of social media. In particular, City employees are prohibited from the following:

- a. Speech containing obscene or sexually explicit language, images, or acts and statements or other forms of speech that ridicule, malign, disparage, or otherwise express bias against

any race, any religion, or any protected class of individuals.

b. Speech involving themselves or other City employees reflecting behavior that would reasonably be considered reckless or irresponsible.

6. Engaging in prohibited speech noted herein, may provide grounds for undermining or impeaching an officer's testimony in criminal proceedings. Police Division personnel thus sanctioned are subject to discipline up to and including termination of office.

7. City employees may not divulge information gained by reason of their authority; make any statements, speeches, appearances, and endorsements; or publish materials that could reasonably be considered to represent the views or positions of the City without express authorization.

8. City employees should be aware that they might be subject to civil litigation for:

a. publishing or posting false information that harms the reputation of another person, group, or organization (defamation);

b. publishing or posting private facts and personal information about someone 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 someone else's name, likeness, or other personal attributes without that person's permission for an exploitative purpose; or

d. publishing the creative work of another, trademarks, or certain confidential business information without the permission of the owner.

9. City employees should be aware that privacy settings and social media sites are constantly in flux, and they should never assume that personal information posted on such sites is protected.

10. City employees should expect that any information created, transmitted, downloaded, exchanged, or discussed in

a public online forum may be accessed by the City at any time without prior notice.

11. Personal use of Social Media sites while on-duty will be limited to time spent on breaks only, and only on personally owned devices. Use of City owned equipment to update personal Social Media sites is prohibited.

12. Reporting violations: Any employee becoming aware of (or having knowledge of) a posting or any website or web page in violation of the provisions of this policy shall notify his or her supervisor immediately for follow-up action.