



# GUIDELINE

## Use of social media

### Direction to staff

Instructional material, including guidelines, is nationally endorsed and in accordance with Section 13(5) "An APS employee must comply with any lawful and reasonable direction given by someone in the employee's Agency who has authority to give direction" of the *Public Service Act 1999* must be followed by all Department of Agriculture (the department) employees.

### Summary of main points

This document outlines the requirements for the use of social media by Department of Agriculture employees, in both an official and unofficial capacity.

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## Purpose of this document

This document describes the standards expected of employees of the Department of Agriculture in their use of social media; it should be read in conjunction with the department's [IT Security Policy](#).

## Definitions

The following table defines terms used in this document.

Term	Definition
Social media	Includes social networking sites, blogs and other online media that allow user participation and interaction.  <b>Note:</b> Use of social media by Australian Public Service (APS) employees can be split into two categories: official use and unofficial use.
Official use	Means use by persons authorised as departmental spokespersons and representatives for official purposes, who are permitted to post content within an approved scope on external social media channels.
Unofficial use	Unofficial use of social media falls into one of two (2) categories: professional or private. <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Professional use is when an employee is a subject matter expert in a field that may relate to their APS employment—or that may be wholly separate from it—and uses social media to comment in that capacity. For example, an APS employee who is a scientist might use social media in their own time to discuss academic work.</li><li>Private use means use of social media in any other capacity.</li></ul>

## Policy statement

The use of social media by departmental staff must be conducted in accordance with the [APS Values](#) and [APS Code of Conduct](#).

## Legislative framework

*Public Service Act 1999, s 13(11).*

- The APS Code of Conduct requires APS employees to behave at all times 'in a way that upholds the APS Values and APS Employment Principles, and the integrity and good reputation of the employee's Agency and the APS'.
- The APS Values and Code of Conduct apply to using social media both officially and unofficially. The requirements include:
  - behaving with respect and courtesy, and without harassment
  - dealing appropriately with information, recognising that some information needs to remain confidential
  - delivering services fairly, effectively, impartially and courteously to the Australian public
  - being sensitive to the diversity of the Australian public
  - taking reasonable steps to avoid conflicts of interest
  - making proper use of Commonwealth resources
  - upholding the APS Values and the integrity and good reputation of the APS and one's agency
  - not acting in a way that would call into question the APS employee's ability to be apolitical, impartial and professional in the performance of their duties.

## Roles and responsibilities

The following table outlines the roles and responsibilities undertaken in this guideline.

Role	Responsibility
Departmental officers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Seeking approval prior to using social media in an official capacity.</li><li>Using social media in accordance with the <a href="#">APS Values</a> and <a href="#">APS Code of Conduct</a>.</li></ul>
SES officers	Approving the official use of social media by their staff.
Assistant Secretary, Governance Branch	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Approving the official use of social media by all departmental staff.</li><li>Setting communication and content standards for the official use of social media.</li></ul>

## All social media use

Department of Agriculture employees should understand that the [APS Values](#) and [APS Code of Conduct](#) standards apply to all social media use.

The APS Values and APS Code of Conduct apply even if material is posted anonymously or using a pseudonym and employees should be mindful that at some point their identity and employment may be revealed.

Possible sanctions, including termination, may apply if employees are found to have breached the APS Values or APS Code of Conduct through their use of social media.

- Note:** [APSC Circular 2012/1: Revisions to the Commission's guidance on making public comment and participating online](#)—discusses the APS Code of Conduct and its relationship to social media in more detail.

## Official social media use

The following table outlines the process for undertaking official use of social media.

**Note:** Acceptable official use by APS employees may include representing the department online, monitoring issues relevant to departmental business and engaging in authorised professional development forums or activities.

Stage	What happens	Responsible party
1.	Written approval to use social media in an official capacity is sought from: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>a relevant SES officer; and</li><li>the Assistant Secretary, Governance Branch.</li></ul>	Employee
2.	Written approval is provided. <b>Note:</b> Communication and content standards that apply to official use of social media will be established as part of this approval.	Relevant SES officer; and Assistant Secretary, Governance Branch

Stage	What happens	Responsible party
3.	Social media is used in accordance with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">APS Values</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">APS Code of Conduct</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">APSC Circular 2012/1: Revisions to the Commission's guidance on making public comment and participating online.</a></li> </ul>	Employee

## Unofficial social media use

When using social media in an unofficial capacity, employees must comply with the requirements in the following table.

### Note:

- Acceptable unofficial use of social media while at work will include reasonable private use, consistent with this guideline and other relevant policies including the department's *IT Security Policy*.
- Employees in doubt about acceptable use of social media as an APS employee, whether at work or not, should speak to their manager in the first instance.

Requirement	What to do
Always	Ensure that any comment made is not (or could not be perceived to be): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• made on behalf of the Department of Agriculture</li> <li>• so harsh or extreme in its criticism of the Government, a member of parliament from another political party, or their respective policies, that it raises questions about the APS employee's capacity to work professionally, efficiently or impartially. Such comment does not have to relate to the employee's area of work</li> <li>• so strong in its criticism of an agency's administration that it could seriously disrupt the workplace</li> <li>• a gratuitous personal attack that might reasonably be perceived to be connected with their employment</li> <li>• compromising the employee's ability to fulfil their duties in an apolitical, impartial and professional manner</li> <li>• compromising public confidence in the agency or the APS.</li> </ul>
Unless specifically authorised	Do not develop or provide content for social media channels that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• attempts to speak, or could be interpreted as speaking, on behalf of the department or the Australian Government</li> <li>• commits the department or the Australian Government to any action or initiative.</li> </ul>

## Related material

- [Department of Agriculture IT Security Policy](#)
- [APS Code of Conduct](#)
- [APS Values](#)
- [APSC Circular 2012/1: Revisions to the Commission's guidance on making public comment and participating online](#)

## Document information

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## Version history

The following table details the published date and amendment details for this document.

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1.0	01/08/2014	First publication of guideline.
1.1	12/08/2014	Name change from Parliamentary and Executive Business Branch to Governance Branch.