



Australian Government

Department of the Environment

Guidelines for the use of social media



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1 PURPOSE

These guidelines set out how the Department of the Environment (the Department) develops and uses social media tools.

These guidelines support the Department's *Social media policy*, and apply both to the Internet and intranet.

2 INTRODUCTION

2.1 What is social media?

Social media is associated with the use of the Internet as a tool for people to create, share or exchange information and work together in virtual communities and networks. Also known as online media or Web 2.0, it is a fast-paced and interactive communication environment.

Social media technologies include social networking sites (e.g. Facebook), media sharing sites (e.g. YouTube, Flickr), wikis, web chats, blogs, microblogging, Internet forums, to name a few.

2.2 Why use social media?

The Australian Government is encouraging the use of social media tools. The Government's intention to create a more open government for consultation and collaboration with the public by using social media tools such as online policy forums and blogs was outlined in *Ahead of the Game: Blueprint for Reform of Australian Government Administration*.

The *Internal Strategic Review Final Report, April 2014* states:

The Department continues to improve its engagement with the community through social media platforms and other ICT, but there remains scope to make better use of technology.

Social media can provide opportunities for the Department to:

- more effectively inform, engage and communicate with staff, stakeholders and the public
- gain an understanding of stakeholder opinions
- improve the transparency of its processes
- complement other communication strategies
- support effective work practices, and
- support the Department's *Strategic Plan 2014 to 2018*.

2.3 Social media tools are part of a broader engagement or communication strategy

Social media tools are most effective when used as a part of an integrated engagement or communication strategy and in the context of the Department's *Stakeholder Engagement Handbook*.

Although 83 per cent¹ of Australian households access the internet, not everyone chooses to engage with social media. Many internet users have limited digital skills and prefer to access information or provide feedback in a more traditional manner. Some social media tools are not accessible to people relying on assistive technology.

While the use of social media is encouraged to engage with stakeholders the Department should ensure that users can get information and give feedback via alternate means.

These may include the publication of information and feedback mechanisms on a departmental website, the use of the Community Information Unit, distribution of printed materials or holding meetings, seminars or forums if your budget is sufficient.

¹ Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics *Household Use of Information Technology, Australia 2012-13* [<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/8146.0Chapter12012-13>] sighted 05/06/2014

3 PERMISSION TO USE SOCIAL MEDIA

The use of social media tools by staff and contractors are governed by the Australian Public Service (APS) Values and Code of Conduct, and the Australian Public Service Commission's (APSC) *Circular 2012/1: Revisions to the Commission's guidance on making public comment and participating online*.

There is a wide range of social media and you can use them in an official or personal (professional or private) capacity provided you adhere to the APSC principles which 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 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
- 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.

Sections 3.1 and 3.2 contain further guidelines which must be followed specific to the purpose of your social media use.

3.1 Official use

3.1.1 All online communication on behalf of the Department must be approved by staff who are authorised to represent the Department in the media

This requirement applies whether you are posting content on an official departmental social media site or providing comment on another organisation's social media site.

Staff commenting on behalf of the Department must be approved to do so prior to participating in any online activities. Staff may be required to use standard and previously cleared words.

Officially commenting on behalf of the Department could be posting a factual answer to a blog post or comment that incorrectly describes the Department's initiative and then, with your answer, providing a link to the correct information. This would normally be done by providing an introductory line establishing your position (e.g. *I am the environment officer responsible for this tender request*) and using a profile linked to an environment email address.

Where you comment in social media channels on departmental matters:

- use your `firstname.lastname@environment.gov.au` address
- declare the purpose of the communication and your position and status as an employee of the Department and that you are authorised to provide an official viewpoint
- avoid announcements or comments that might bring the Department and the Australian Government into disrepute
- be accurate and impartial and avoid any comment that could be interpreted as a political view
- ensure consistency of information with other departmental information and advice
- do not commit the Department or the Australian Government to any initiatives without appropriate authority
- do not disclose official information unless approval has been obtained to do so or unless it is already in the public domain
- take into account laws covering libel, defamation, privacy, copyright and the protection of intellectual property
- consider whether your comment may be considered a Commonwealth record

- avoid the risk of liability for the Department by not providing recommendations or referrals for friends and or acquaintances
- avoid statements that might be interpreted as advocating government policies or criticising the policies of other agencies, political parties or groups
- be aware that people online may disguise their real identity
- understand how to use privacy settings and preferences to restrict access to content
- obtain prior permission to use words, images or materials for online communications, and
- show respect for the individuals and communities with which they interact.

Any engagement from journalists on social media should be referred to media@environment.gov.au.

3.2 Personal (unofficial) use

Limited personal use of social media sites – and the Internet generally – is acceptable only before or after hours or during lunch or recognised shift breaks.

Staff are reminded that the use of social media is subject to the Working Arrangements Scheme defined in the *Enterprise Agreement* and the *Guidelines for use of IT Facilities*.

An employee is required to:

- fulfil their contract of employment by being productively engaged in their official duties while at work.
- avoid waste and extravagance in the use of Commonwealth Resources.

Staff should make a clear distinction between their personal social media identity and their official association with the Department by:

- use of different log-in names and accounts for official and personal social interactions
- considering carefully any use of work email addresses for registration or membership of online communities outside approved government sites
- ensuring there are no links between personal and official networking activities
- if revealing their place of work on personal social media sites, for example LinkedIn, be aware that this may place a higher responsibility on them in regard to the public representation of the Department as comments may affect the Department's reputation, and
- not posting photographs of colleagues at work-related functions and work-related activities after hours, or while away from home, without their consent.

Departmental material should not be uploaded to personal social media accounts or cloud services such as Google Drive, Dropbox etc. If you require access to work related material away from the office you can arrange for [Remote access to the network](#).

3.2.1 Professional use

The Australian Public Service Commission explains Professional use as:

Some employees are subject matter experts in fields that may relate to their APS employment—or which may be wholly separate from it—and might make comment in that capacity.²

Staff who comment as an 'expert' in a particular work related field should:

- notify their manager of any comment that they propose to make as an 'expert' that might reflect on their employment with the Department, and
- make it clear that they are not commenting on behalf of the Department.

² Source: APSC Circular 2012/1 Revisions to the Commission's guidance on making public comment and participating online (social media), [http://www.apsc.gov.au/publications-and-media/circulars-and-advises/2012/circular-20121], sighted 20 March 2012.

3.2.2 Private use of social media

The use of social media outside work on a staff member's own equipment is supported by the Department. However, you should remember the distinction between your identity and views as a private citizen and your role as an APS employee.

The APSC case study, *Another life* – an APS employee making comments as a private citizen on his personal site – provides lessons on how the APS Values and Code of Conduct apply to private social media usage³.

3.2.3 Personal security issues

Staff using social media for personal purposes need to consider their own security and that of their colleagues and family members before listing personal details.

Use of social media sites carries the risk of identity fraud and other threats which may result from providing personal information such as age, address and employment details. Additionally, when online personal information is publicly available, people may use it to find ways to harass or threaten. This form of harassment is known as Cyber Bullying.

You should restrict the amount of personal information you divulge to those details essential to your participation in the online community.

3.2.4 Legal responsibilities

Staff need to be aware of the laws covering libel, defamation, privacy and the protection of intellectual property. Staff must not make any statement that might harm the reputation of individuals, the government or the Department, or which may expose the government or the Department to claims from third parties who could suffer a loss as a result of relying on such statements. You should contact the General Counsel Branch if you require assistance.

• ³ The case study is available on the APSC website at the following address:
<http://www.apsc.gov.au/ethics/multimedia-resources/another-life>

4 MANAGING OFFICIAL DEPARTMENTAL SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNTS

4.1 Establishing social media accounts

4.1.1 New official social media accounts

Official departmental social media accounts must only be set up by Policy and Communications Branch (PCB). This will allow the Department to understand its overall social media presence and manage associated risks.

If a social media tool or platform you want to use has not already be approved for use by the Department, it must first be assessed by Information Technology Branch (ITB) to determine if it meets the requirements of the *Enterprise Architecture Principles*, *ICT security policy*, and *Guidelines for storage and processing of information using a cloud service* and other relevant policies.

ITB will consult with General Counsel Branch to determine whether a proposed social media tool or platform owner's terms and conditions, licensing requirements etc conflict with departmental or Australian Government policies

If found suitable, proposed tools will be approved by the Chief Information Officer.

Requests to assess unapproved social media tools and platforms for use by the Department should be sent to the [Environment Servicedesk](#).

Social media platforms currently approved for use for official departmental purposes include:

- Facebook
- Twitter
- Flickr
- YouTube
- Vimeo⁴
- GovSpace online communications platform (for blogs)
- Govdex for closed-community wikis and forums

4.1.2 Existing departmental social media accounts

The Department already uses a number of social media tools. If your programme or initiative has limited resources, or has a short term need to use social media, you should in the first instance make use of the Department's social media presence. This will assist you to reach the widest possible audience at minimal expense.

A list of Department social media accounts is available on the Intranet

Contact PCB staff if you wish to provide content for existing channels.

There must be strong reasons to have a separate social media account outside the Department's existing presence.

4.1.3 Internal communication and collaboration

'Public cloud' social media tools may only be used for external stakeholder engagement.

Internal communication and collaboration activities must use the social media-like features available in the Department's SharePoint platform or other internal collaboration tools.

Services that use public Internet infrastructure do not offer a sufficient level of security to meet the Department's *ICT Security Policy* even if a 'private community' is established in the service.

SharePoint is able to provide:

⁴ Note that Vimeo by default does not provide captions and transcripts for video. Provision of these are mandatory requirements for Australian Government agencies in order to meet accessibility obligations. A 'Vimeo-Pro' level plan would need to be set up so that a compliant video player could be integrated with Departmental video.

- video hosting
- photo galleries/slideshows
- blogs
- discussion forums, and
- surveys, and more.

The Department has also released Microsoft Lync, which provides instant messaging functionality.

Directors may approve the establishment of social media like functionality on the Intranet for their section's content.

4.1.4 Business objectives

Before deciding which social media tool to use, think about your business objectives. Consider:

- which audience you are targeting
- which social media platforms your audience are already using or most likely to use
- if you want **users** to:
 - give feedback
 - work together by creating or enhancing content
 - share your message with others, or
 - simply follow a link to a departmental website
- what you intend to do with the comments
- the benefits and risks of using social media and mitigations for those risks, and
- ongoing resource implications of engaging in social media; do not open a social media account you cannot maintain at the frequency that the audience expects.

PCB staff can advise you on which social media channels match your goals and objectives.

ITB staff can provide technical advice on the most suitable social media technology, what settings are required (e.g. privacy and moderation settings), and other considerations.

[Attachment A](#) provides a list of social media tools and outlines their possible uses.

[Attachment B](#) contains a list of social media or Web 2.0 tools in government.

[Attachment C](#) has more information on how to use social media strategically.

4.1.5 Communication plan

The Assistant Secretary PCB authorises the establishment of new accounts for external use.

Authorisation is subject to each proposed social media account having a detailed communication plan which includes an outline of:

- business drivers and objectives
- resource requirements (both human and financial)
- responsibilities and accountabilities, including an explanation of roles
- management protocols, for example:
 - if comments will be allowed or not, and if so which moderation model will be used
 - processes for responding to comments (including response times)
 - if sharing content from other social media sites is allowed, and
 - issues management
- important messages the tool will be used to communicate
- how the social media tool will support, interact with or be promoted in other communication activities and channels such as departmental websites, other social media accounts or offline activities such as print, tv or radio advertising, meetings and workshops etc
- expected lifespan of the initiative (i.e. ongoing or for a specified duration), and
- how success will be measured.

PCB staff can assist in the development of the communication plan.

4.1.6 Resourcing

Managing and maintaining an online presence, including staffing, should be taken into account when identifying costs for a social media project.

Adequate resourcing of social media accounts is critical. Blogs, Twitter and social networking sites that haven't been updated for months could make the Department look disorganised and incompetent. Social media is designed to contain the most up-to-date information about issue or organisation.

If you choose to monitor your account between 9am and 5pm Monday to Friday, it is advisable to include this information on your account to manage visitor expectations.

In addition to providing resources to publish stories and messages, adequate resources must be available to:

- drafting and clearing content including clearance processes
- moderate user comments, including checking for messages that require a response
- creating transcripts and other alternative formats for content
- undertake record keeping activities
- monitor the performance of the account
- reviewing policies and procedures, and
- shut down the account when it is no longer required.

4.1.7 Social media accounts for the Minister and Parliamentary Secretary

If you are asked to establish social media accounts on behalf of the Minister or Parliamentary Secretary, please contact PCB staff in the first instance.

4.2 Implementing public facing social media accounts

Once your proposal has been approved by your Branch Head, the Assistant Secretary Policy and Communications Branch, and where applicable the Chief Information Officer, the operational procedures below are to be followed.

4.2.1 Account creation and settings

Select the staff that are to have administrator access to the account. It is a good idea to have a number of staff members able to publish the content.

PCB will create the social media site on your behalf and keep a record of the account, its purpose and staff authorised to use the account.

In special circumstances an outside contractor could be engaged, but this should be discussed with ITB. Contractors must be procured using existing panel arrangements and you should seek advice from ITB and PCB.

When staff leave the Department, they must inform PCB to have their administrator access removed.

PCB will be responsible for managing the account settings.

4.2.2 Visual design

Visual design or 'theming' of social media tools must use elements from departmental or approved programme branding. This will ensure that the social media tool is:

- clearly identified as belonging to the Department
- consistent with other formal communication channels, and
- trusted by users as a reliable source of information.

The Web Team and PCB can provide advice on the visual design of social media tools.

4.2.3 Preparing and publishing content

Information or comments posted on the social media site should be in line with a communication plan prepared in consultation with PCB and Community Information Unit and approved by the relevant SES.

Staff managing Department accounts must follow these *Guidelines* and use approved content. Clearance must be sought for activities not outlined in the communication plan.

Social media should direct users back to website and content on other channels.

Social media should not be used where other processes exist. For example, when using social media to seek input for consultation, users should be directed to formal consultation channels such as Citizen Space or online contact details to provide written submissions.

Content also includes retweeting and sharing content from other sites. You should consider if reposting to your platform could be seen as endorsing the site you are sharing from and if this is appropriate for an Australian Government account.

Be aware that who you follow, like, invite to participate also makes up the content of your account. You will need to exercise discretion when selecting other accounts to be linked or associated with yours. PCB can assist with the preparation of content including multimedia and provide advice on using third-party or crowdsourced content including the correct acknowledgements.

PCB staff and authorised representatives can post comments and information to the social media site.

4.2.4 User focus

Social media messages must be 'user-focussed'.

This means messages are to be specifically written for the audience of that social media platform. Different social media platforms lend themselves to different audiences. Spend time 'listening' to conversations on social media platforms to gain an understanding of the style of language used before posting messages.

Avoid using corporate jargon and formal language in your messages. A more conversational style is recommended as social media is about having conversations with users.

PCB staff can provide advice on appropriate language style.

4.2.5 Moderation

Moderation refers to the management of user generated content by monitoring submissions and applying a set of rules that define what is acceptable, what is not, then removing unacceptable material.

It is up to your area to decide what level of moderation is required for the social media site and ensure participants meet the 'terms of use policy'.

The two main approaches are:

- **Pre-moderation**

All submissions are reviewed and approved before going online. This can be labour intensive and stall user participation if it takes too long for their comments to appear online, or if users perceive they are being censored.

- **Post-moderation**

All content is displayed on the site immediately, but is reviewed by a moderator and removed if necessary. Post moderation may also use automated filters that include a list of words that may be deemed offensive or likely to be spam messages.

Other moderation options include reactive moderation, where users report posts that contravene the site's terms of use policy, or distributed moderation which relies on community members voting on the appropriateness of comments.

Official Department social media accounts must be moderated.

With some social media platforms, the tool itself offers limited moderation functionality. For example, with Twitter you may be limited to blocking individuals from following the account and may not be able to 'delete' third party tweets without additional tools or reporting an individual to Twitter for violating [Twitter Rules](#) and Terms of Service. The lack of the ability to delete user comments does not amount to the account having 'no moderation'.

PCB can advise you on recommended words for moderation warnings, conduct or behaviour requirements for followers and contributors to a site, and provide a way for users to report issues.

4.2.6 Terms of use statements

Before using social media sites, you should ensure that there is no conflict for the Department in complying with the platform owner's terms of use or service. Note that while this is generally reviewed during the process to approve a social media tool for use within the Department, platform owners may change their terms and conditions from time-to-time without notice.

Potentially, all content posted to social networking sites becomes:

- public information freely available to those who access it
- information that can be used as source material for journalists and other interested parties,
- and may become the property of the networking host.

Refer to [Attachment D](#) for statements to use for particular social media sites. These have been cleared by the General Counsel Branch. If there is a need for amendment, obtain General Counsel Branch's clearance.

4.2.7 Measuring and monitoring

Consult with the PCB for advice on what statistics are able to be obtained and how they should be interpreted.

It will be important to carefully measure and monitor the responses to online consultation. It can be appropriate to provide both quantitative and qualitative measures. To assist in the overall assessment of the consultation approach some basic metrics should be collected and analysed.

At the conclusion of a consultation approach using social media, a basic report should be provided to PCB. PCB will be responsible for maintaining a 'whole of Department' understanding about the use of, success, issues etc in using social media.

4.2.8 Records management

Information posted on official social media accounts which contains evidence of the Department's business activities may be defined as a record. You must comply with the Department's *Records management policy* and the *Archives Act 1983*. Keep a copy of all messages posted and received for record keeping purposes.

Consult with Records Management Unit for more information on record keeping and the requirements for your specific use.

Consult with ITB about the possibility of setting up a form on the intranet to record the submission and approval of posts. This will aid in recording approvals and maintaining copies of messages.

4.2.9 Accessibility

The Australian Government endorses *Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) version 2.0* for all government web sites and this includes content made available from social media sites.

However, since most social media tools are provided by third-party 'platform owners', it may be difficult to ensure the tool does not present barriers to users of assistive technology. This is because design and development of social media tools are outside the direct control of account holders.

As discussed in [section 2.3](#), a social media tool should not be the only way users can obtain information or provide feedback. To mitigate the risk an assistive technology user cannot access material on a social media site, it must also be available on the Department's website plus offline channels where appropriate.

4.2.10 Copyright

Be aware that on many social media platforms, copyright in materials submitted to the social media platform will no longer belong to the Commonwealth. Please consult the respective Terms of Use for details about copyright of submitted material.

The Department licences its website content under a Creative Commons Australia licence version 3.0.

Subject to the terms of use on particular social media platforms and except where otherwise stated:

- users may use all material posted by the Department on its social media channels under a Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 Australia licence, and
- material posted by any other person other than the Department, such as public users of the Department's social media channels will usually agree to their material being made available to users under a Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 licence as a condition of use of that channel.

Contact General Counsel Branch if you require more information about Copyright.

4.2.11 Privacy

You must adhere to Australian Privacy Principles (APPs) which are set out in Schedule 1 of the *Privacy Act 1988*.

Do not provide contact details or photographs or personal conversations of other staff unless you have obtained their permission or obtained appropriate clearance to do so.

The development of an appropriate approach to user registration and/or authentication is a fundamental consideration.

The collection of personal information may not be necessary or appropriate for all channels. Only collect personal information as appropriate and collect as little personal information as possible. Line areas must be aware of the importance of having a privacy statement (see [Attachment E for a privacy statement](#)) when collecting any personal information.

A minimal approach is probably the best as research indicates that people may be discouraged from participating if they have to provide too much personal information. Requirements will vary with different consultation objectives and models. It is important to design the registration and/or authentication approach so that it is fit for the purpose of the consultation.

Contact the Privacy Contact Officer in the General Counsel Branch for further advice on privacy matters. Contact details are privacy@environment.gov.au or 6275 9255.

4.3 Implementing internal social media features

If you require advice on which internal social media feature will best suit your communication goals you should seek advice from the Internal Communications Team in People Strategies Branch.

Once your Director has approved the establishment of a social-media like feature for internal use, contact ITB via the [Environment Service desk](#).

The Intranet Team will set up the appropriate SharePoint feature on the intranet.

5 ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Secretary

- with advice from the Executive Board, sets the vision and direction for social media business use in the Department.

Chief Information Officer – Assistant Secretary Information Technology Branch (CIO)

- approves the social media tools and platforms authorised for use by the Department.

Assistant Secretary – Policy and Communications Branch

- authorises the establishment of new accounts for approved social media tools or platforms on the Internet and advises on the use of social media as an engagement and communications tool.

Branch Heads

- approve comments provided by staff on behalf of the Department⁵.
- ensure there is a well planned business case and communication strategy, and a thorough identification of risks and management responses to those risks for social media accounts.

Directors

- for internal communication and collaboration:
 - authorise the use of an approved SharePoint social media tool on the intranet, and
 - consider the benefits of having a communication strategy.
- for external social media initiatives, ensure that:
 - advice and assistance sought from PCB on the preparation of the social media account communication plan and its role in whole-of-department engagement and communications, and
 - risks in using the social media account are identified and will be managed accordingly.
- ensure staff follow these guidelines.

Policy and Communications Branch (PCB)

- provide line areas with advice on which social media tool or tools best meet a programme or initiative's communication objectives
- set up social media accounts and maintain a record of social media in use
- respond to Parliamentary Questions on Notice and complete Department of Finance surveys or reporting about social media
- assist line areas develop communication plans and messages for each external social media tool and account
- develop multimedia content
- advise on appropriate language, messaging and communication channels and help ensure that the proposal meets branding and other requirements
- with ITB maintain a 'whole of Department' understanding about the official use of social media

⁵ Exceptions:

- staff that have been authorised to represent the Department in the media, and
- arrangements may be made for items, for example directly lifted from other cleared content, to be posted online with Director-level PCB clearance.

- with ITB and PSB, develop and maintain policies and guidelines for staff use of social media.

Information Technology Branch (ITB)

- review and provide advice on social media tools and platforms for technical suitability including their ability to integrate with other departmental systems and services, and support ICT security, record keeping and web content accessibility objectives
- recommend to CIO which social media tools and platforms should be approved for use
- identify bandwidth or other ICT issues
- set up links to social media accounts on the Department's websites
- set up social media features on the intranet
- with PCB, maintain a 'whole of Department' understanding about the official use of social media
- with PCB and PSB, develop and maintain policies and guidelines for staff use of social media.

People Strategies Branch

- provide advice to supervisors and managers on the management of staff use of social media
- investigate allegations of staff misuse of social media
- with ITB and PCB, develop and maintain policies and guidelines for staff use of social media.

Records Management Unit

- advise on recordkeeping and archiving requirements.

General Counsel Branch

- advise whether social media tool or platform's terms and conditions, licensing requirements etc conflict with departmental or Australian Government policies
- prepare terms of use statements for official departmental social media sites.

Line areas

- consult with PCB to determine the most appropriate social media tool
- conduct a risk assessment and develop management responses to identified risks
- ongoing management of messages
- monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of social media tools.

All staff and contractors

- abide by the APS Values, Code of Conduct and Protocols for Online Media Participation when participating in online social media
- adhere to the *Privacy Act 1988 and the APPs*. Contact details or photographs of other departmental employees must not be used unless their permission has been obtained
- follow the Department's *Guidelines for use of social media*
- comply with all other relevant legislation and departmental policies, instructions and guidelines.