

Administrative Policy No. 15.24

Subject:	Social Media Policy
Information Contact:	Senior Director, Office of Communications MS 45100; (360) 902-8007
Authorizing Source:	Office of Communications Administrative Policy 15.15 (Use of Electronic Messaging Systems and the Internet), and Administrative Policy 15.18.2 (Privacy for Internet Websites & Web Applications)
Effective Date:	September 25, 2014
Revised:	January 22, 2020
Approved By:	Original signed by Lori Melchiori Senior Director, Office of Policy and Rules

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to establish specific guidelines as to the creation of social media sites and authorized business use of social media by Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) employees. DSHS views social media as an opportunity to enhance communication among clients, stakeholders, partners, employees, legislators and the public. Social media demonstrates that DSHS values and supports an informed, inspired, and engaged citizenry and staff through building positive public awareness and strengthening dialogue.

Scope

This policy establishes the department's position on the use of social media and the approval process DSHS employees must follow before accessing or developing sites, or using social media for DSHS business purposes.

Definitions

Social media is an umbrella term encompassing various activities that integrate technology, social interaction, and content creation. Social media includes blogs, wikis, photo and video sharing, podcasts, social networking, and discussion boards, among other types. Platforms include, but are not limited to, Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, and Flickr.

Social networking: The use of social media as a communication tool for building online communities and communicating with groups of individuals.

Terms of service: The conditions established by a third-party social-media application provider, which must be accepted before a user is given access to the tool.

Terms of use: The conditions established by the department to manage agency-sponsored social media sites.

Policy

Social media tools are a powerful method of communication used by millions of individuals and groups to share information and connect with others. The department will use tools and channels when appropriate to enhance communication and engagement with customers, partners, stakeholders, employers, team members, and others to support its mission, key goals, and core processes.

This policy describes how the agency will use social media and gives direction and guidelines for proper use of social media while at work and outside the workplace.

1. The department authorizes the use of social media *only* for pre-approved official state business purposes.
 - a. Office of Communications staff authorized to use social media for approved agency purposes must:
 - i. Never post any information that is designated by law or administrative rule as sensitive or confidential.
 - ii. Comply with all department security and confidentiality requirements.
 - iii. Read and comply with the social media site's Terms of Service and Privacy Policy.
 - iv. Use social media sites for approved agency purposes consistent with federal and state privacy laws and policies.
 - v. Comply with copyright and intellectual property requirements.
 - vi. Post a terms of use statement and the [department's privacy notice](#) on any department-sponsored social media site that allows comments.
 - vii. Retain all content in accordance with the department's [Records Retention Policy](#) because all social media content, including user comments, constitutes a public record.
 - b. DSHS social media must not be used to transmit information or knowingly connect to sites for an unlawful or prohibited purpose. See provisions and restrictions in Administrative Policies [15.15](#) and [15.18.2](#). Additional examples include, but are not limited to the following:
 - Discrimination on the basis of sex, race, creed, color, gender identity or expression, religion, age, marital status, national origin, sensory, mental or physical disability, sexual orientation, or veteran status.
 - Sexual harassment or sites containing sexual content.
 - Transmission of obscene materials.
 - Transmission of protected or private information.
 - Infringement on any copyright.

- Expression of any campaign, political, or religious beliefs.
 - Conduct of a personal, outside, or other business for purpose of financial benefit or gain.
 - Vulgar, offensive, threatening or harassing language, or personal attacks.
 - Promotion or advertising of commercial services, entities, or products.
2. The non-business personal use of social media by employees during business hours or using department resources (time and equipment) is prohibited.
 3. Department social media use is subject to all federal, state, and agency laws, policies, and guidelines. It is the responsibility of all site sponsors and their approved employee site users to be familiar with the following:
 - a. The department's [Reasonable Accommodation Policy](#)
 - b. The department's [Equal Access to Services for Individuals with Disabilities Policy](#)
 - c. The department's [Discrimination and Harassment Prevention Policy](#)
 - d. The department's [Information data classification and protection](#) documents
 - e. The department's [information security breach notification processes](#)
 - f. The department's [Use of Electronic Messaging Systems and the Internet Policy](#)
 - g. The Department's [Standards of Ethical Conduct for Employees Policy](#)
 - h. Washington state and department records retention policies

Procedures

1. In order to maintain agency branding, the Office of Communications at the direction of the senior director or designee is responsible for establishing and supervising all social media accounts for the agency. Individual administrations, programs, and units within administrations may not establish a DSHS-sponsored social media account. "Rogue" accounts can have the best intentions but too many voices and inconsistency in messaging dilutes the agency's brand. With more than 16,000 employees and six administrations, we must limit the number of accounts the agency uses.
2. The Office of Communications, at the direction of the senior director or designee is responsible for establishing, monitoring, and administering policies for appropriate conduct, content, security, and records retention on all social media accounts for the agency.
3. Posting and maintaining of content on DSHS-sponsored social media accounts is limited to social media representatives designated by the senior director. Only social media representatives are permitted to log on and post content to DSHS social media accounts.
4. Administrations, programs, and units of the agency are encouraged to contribute content for posting to social media sites. Content should be developed for administrations through their communications lead who will then work with the Office of Communications to get posted. Social media content should be given in advance, most

posts will be put up within 24 hours. In the event of an emergency closure, weather event, etc. there is always a Media Relations Manager on call who has the ability to post.

5. Social media account management must take place during paid work hours using state equipment.

Obligations regarding personal use of social media

DSHS takes no position on employees' personal use of social media outside the workplace (that is, using their own time and their own resources). It is the agency's obligation, however, to inform all staff of their responsibilities regarding communications involving the agency, its employees, and its customers on personal social media sites:

1. Employees must not represent that they speak on behalf of the agency on a personal social media site. Employees who mention DSHS as their employer on a personal media site should identify any views they express as theirs and not representative of the views of the agency.
2. Disclosure of confidential agency information is prohibited. DSHS employees may not post confidential or private information about the agency, other employees, clients, or patients on any social media site. Sharing private or confidential information is subject to disciplinary action up to and including dismissal.
3. Posting agency business, such as sharing information that could identify a client or other confidential information, on personal social media sites is prohibited. Agency business is to be performed during established work hours using agency resources. Employees must not conduct agency business or discuss work-related issues on personal social media sites.

Recommended best practices

Common sense and sound judgment are usually the best tools to avoid problems. The following best practices are highly recommended for any DSHS employee who use social media:

- Employees identifying themselves as working for a state government agency need to be aware that [Article 28 of the Collective Bargaining Agreement](#) states "off-duty activities of an employee will not be grounds for disciplinary action unless said activities are a conflict of interest as set forth in [Chapter 42.52 RCW](#), or are detrimental to the employee's work performance or the program of the agency." If a post is deemed to have detrimental connotations to an agency or to a staff member's ability to perform their position, the agency can take disciplinary action against the employee, up to and including dismissal.
- Be respectful. Individuals should be thoughtful in personal posts and respectful of how other people in their work and personal life may be affected or viewed by those who read your posts. When disagreeing with others' opinions, keep it appropriate and polite.
- Honor others' privacy. If an employee plans to post photos they have taken of work-related events and activities, be courteous by checking first with co-workers who are in the picture. Not everyone wants their photo displayed on social media.

- Make sure facts are accurate before asking DSHS Office of Communications to post information.
- Correct errors quickly. If a mistake is made the agency will admit it. We will be upfront and quickly provide correct information. If appropriate, we will modify an earlier post to make it clear that the error has been corrected.
- Employees should be aware of their DSHS association. Individuals who identify themselves as a DSHS employee or who have a public-facing position within the agency should ensure their profile and related content (even if it is of a personal and not an official nature) is consistent with how they wish to present themselves as a DSHS professional. All content should be appropriate with the public trust associated with their position.
- Have no expectation of privacy. Remember that posts in the social media world are or can easily be made available to the public at-large. Keep in mind that content published on social media will be widely accessible for some time and, in some cases, indefinitely.

DSHS Official