NSW Government

Social Media Policy and Guidelines

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1 Policy

1.1 Policy Statement

The purpose of this policy is to encourage agencies to make greater use of social media and empower public sector staff to use these tools where it assists in improving service delivery. In using these tools, staff must always be aware of their responsibilities and obligations of their employment and in accordance with the *Code of Ethics and Conduct for NSW government sector employees*.

Agencies are to develop and implement targeted social media policies, governance structures, and guidance, including appropriate training and support for staff, to meet their business needs.

This policy is intended to align with existing departmental policies, such as the code of conduct, media policies, and policies on acceptable use of information technology. This policy does not supersede existing agency policies, however, agencies may review and update current policies to reflect the guiding principles outlined in this document.

Those performing work for the NSW Government should be aware that the use of social media even in a personal capacity, may be governed by agency policies and authorisation protocols, as for any public comment or media strategy.

It is acknowledged that the implementation of social media across agencies will vary according to business needs and service delivery priorities.

1.2 Context

Social media is now an important part of our personal and professional lives. It has created a fundamental shift in how we communicate and relate to friends, colleagues, government, business and communities. And in doing so, has raised the potential for greater visibility of how government operates as well as greater accessibility to government information and data.

The Government direction for agencies to make greater use of social media is communicated through Premier's memorandum *M2012 - 10 Open Government*.

The *NSW Government ICT Strategy Digital + 2016* outlines the approach to the way the NSW Government uses, manages and procures information and communications technology.

The widespread adoption of social media across the sector has seen more information become accessible to greater numbers of citizens. It provides an opportunity to proactively distribute information to citizens quickly and in easily accessible formats, in accordance with the *Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009*.

NSW Metrics Report

The NSW ICT Metrics Report analyses data from a variety of sources covering expenditure, volumetric, personnel and service capability data to inform the NSW Government ICT strategic direction. It provides visibility of ICT expenditure and personnel trends against government and industry benchmarks. The 2014/15 Metrics Report shows that the NSW Government is more mobile, citizen focused, collaborative and open:

- ***More mobile***

The number of ‘mobile’ public servants is increasing with the number of tablets increasing 90%, laptops 21% and smartphones 99%. Bring Your Own Device has had a 129% increase in the reporting period.

- ***More citizen focused***

In 2014/15, Service NSW received a consistent customer satisfaction rate of 98% while 33% more agencies conducted monthly or bi-annual customer satisfaction surveys than previous years.

- ***More open***

There are 55,000 datasets available on Data.NSW through 348 data collections.

- ***More collaborative***

93% of NSW Government agencies now have social media policies in place. Social media accounts grew 46% to 1,759 accounts. The strongest growth was seen in Facebook accounts and Twitter accounts in support of the government engaging more directly with citizens Online submissions received from the public increased 61% from 8,696 to 13,955.

Records Management

Social media records are considered records for the purposes of the *State Records Act 1998*, and therefore must be created, managed and disposed of in accordance with the Act.

Advice on strategies for managing social media information can be found on the State Records NSW website.

1.3 Objectives

While social media has enhanced the range of forums that we can communicate within, its use within government must demonstrate value to our customers and stakeholders.

The objectives of this policy are to:

- recognise social media as integral to contemporary business communication and provide a framework for its use in the NSW Government
- guide and support public sector staff to be responsible and proactive digital citizens
- enable agencies to maximise the effective use of social media, recognising the diversity of business needs and approaches
- accelerate collaboration and engagement with the public, with industry and across Government.

1.4 Guiding principles

The NSW Government encourages agencies to use social media in a way that is consistent with five guiding principles. In using social media, agencies should be open, collaborative, responsive, reliable and appropriate.

Open

Use social media to share and promote access to information and services, be transparent and accountable, and raise awareness of government strategic directions and initiatives.

Collaborative

Create opportunities to listen to and engage with staff, the public, local communities, and industry in community and capacity building, policy design and implementation and service delivery.

Responsive

Empower public sector staff to use social media to respond quickly to customers and emerging issues, promoting increased customer satisfaction.

Reliable

Support a consistent and quality experience.

Appropriate

Use social media in a manner that is consistent with public sector values, legal requirements, related policies, and our codes of conduct.

1.5 Scope

This policy applies to all officers, consultants, contractors and outsourced service providers performing work for the NSW Government.

State Owned Corporations are encouraged to use social media in a manner that is consistent with this policy.

This policy applies to the use of social media accounts for work undertaken for the NSW Government. Staff use of personal accounts is governed by agency acceptable use of technology policies where it affects employee responsibilities. Personal comments made by staff are governed by agency codes of conduct and communications policies.

1.6 Definitions

The term social media refers to user-generated content that is shared online through technologies “that promote engagement, sharing and collaboration” (Matthew Tommasi). It transforms users “from content readers into publishers” (Brian Solis).

Examples of social media applications include:

- Micro-blogging sites (examples: Twitter)
- Weblogs, or ‘blogs’ - online diaries for pictures and updates (examples: Tumblr, Blogger)
- Social and professional networking sites (examples: Facebook, LinkedIn, Yammer)
- Video and photo sharing websites (examples: Instagram, YouTube, Flickr, Pinterest)
- Wikis and online collaboration tools (example: Wikipedia, Sharepoint)
- Forums and discussion boards (examples: Google Groups, Ning, Whirlpool)
- Video on Demand and podcasting (example: SoundCloud)

1.7 Next steps

A full review of this policy will commence in 2017.

2 Guidelines for agencies

2.1 Create opportunities to listen to and engage with staff, the public and industry in community building, policy discussion and service design

- Research the target audience to ensure your strategy and its implementation meets needs and expectations.
- Use social networking sites to present policy discussions and capture feedback from stakeholders. Where appropriate, agencies should refer to social media channels in their Agency Information Guide (AIG) as a means to facilitate, inform and encourage community and industry participation in government decision-making processes and policy formulation. Under the *Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009*, agencies are required to have an AIG, and should specify the arrangements that exist to enable citizens to participate in policy formulation and the exercise of agency functions.
- Produce content about the agency's area of expertise.
- Tap into other customer touchpoints, such as call centres, to share knowledge and reduce duplication.
- Engage with community through any whole of government engagement platforms that are developed.

2.2 Empower public sector staff to use social media to respond quickly to customers and emerging issues

- Establish or review existing business rules to discover, evaluate and respond to online comments.
- Act quickly to remove offensive, defamatory, bullying or other unacceptable comments.
- Set and meet timeframes for service delivery.

- Have processes in place to ensure complaints and other feedback are correctly defined, triaged and addressed.
- Put in place a critical issue management plan outlining staff responsibilities.
- Within resourcing restraints, respond to changes in technology and public demand.
- Use platforms familiar to your audience.

2.3 Support a consistent and quality experience

- Ensure the decision to implement a social media communication strategy is adequately scoped and resourced. Many social media tools are free to use and quick to set up. However, ongoing effort is required to manage accounts to deliver a consistent, dedicated customer service. Consider the investment in staff time and other resources involved in moderation, creating content and responding to comments.
- Establish a governance mechanism to guide, monitor and evaluate social media management. Consider the lifecycle of your social media account and plan for decommissioning requirements.
- Branding and messaging across all communications channels (social media, websites, print publications), should be consistent.

2.4 Greater community engagement and better results from social media

Effective use of social media will help deliver on the Premier's priority to *improve customer satisfaction with government services*. Agencies should identify opportunities where social media could be employed to distribute information quickly and easily to citizens, and receive feedback on services.

Targeted social media use can increase community engagement in government processes by enabling active participation in government decision-making, and the design and delivery of government services.

Coordinated messaging distributed across social media accounts will maximize reach to broader demographics. While underlying messaging should remain consistent with

other communications channels, content should be tailored to the unique characteristics of each social media to ensure better reach to the target audience.

Understanding the impact of social media through the use of analytics tools will deliver better results. Retrieving and assessing data will aid and inform ongoing engagement with customers, and improve the capture of views on NSW Government services.

2.5 Social media approaches

The approach taken by agencies will vary to suit business needs. The level of activity adopted by your organisation may be described as passive, active or engaged. Information in this section is adapted from material produced by the New Zealand Government, licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 New Zealand licence.

2.5.1 Passive

In some cases, it may be appropriate to take a passive approach to the use of social media. Your organisation may simply listen to conversations taking place online for the purpose of gathering information, monitoring a situation, or understanding an audience. A passive approach may be a starting point before a more active approach is adopted.

2.5.2 Active

Many people are active users of social media. This approach means becoming more involved in online discussions and sharing links and other useful information. Agency policies should require staff to identify themselves as representatives of the organisation if they post messages on work-related topics.

2.5.3 Engaged

A fully engaged approach is recommended to make the most of social media. This level of activity describes a proactive dialogue with the audience. There is a higher expectation of responsiveness and participation at this level.

2.6 Checklist

Agencies will make arrangements for the implementation of their own social media policy, giving consideration to:

- Governance, including staff education and training, monitoring, risk assessment, evaluation and policy review.
- Business operating conditions and allied policies and programs.
- Privacy, intellectual property and records management.
- Resourcing for all activities and at all levels of the organisation.
- Change management.

Below is a checklist of steps to consider in developing a social media policy.

2.6.1 Planning

- Determine the existing policies that will be impacted by the introduction of a new social media policy.
- Identify the communication and engagement goals for the organisation, and design indicators for measuring success against these.
- Identify and research the target audience.
- Include a risk assessment to identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the intended approach.
- Research similar approaches that may be relevant to the organisation.
- Scope set-up and ongoing requirements including human and financial resources.
- Evaluate and install products.

2.6.2 Implementation

- Establish a governance model for content development and account management.
- Define roles and responsibilities.
- Develop terms of use and determine the appropriate level of engagement. These should include privacy guidelines, and may also include hours of operation, response times, moderation actions, and other community instructions.
- Communicate the policy to organisation staff.
- Provide authorised staff with training in the use of social media.

2.6.3 Management

- Adopt the guiding principles outlined in this document.
- Promote social media accounts.
- Keep appropriate records in accordance with the *State Records Act 1998* and manage the account lifecycle.
- Integrate social media with other communications and customer service channels.

2.6.4 Evaluate and report on the agency's use of social media

- Maintain records of the use of social media accounts, including but not limited to the number of accounts, types of accounts, followers and submissions received.
- Understand the impact of social media use by using social media management and analytics tools to retrieve and assess data. Some platforms provide basic analytics products free of charge, while paid products will have greater features. Examples include Google Analytics (Standard or Premium), Hootsuite, Lexer, Isentia.

2.7 Examples

Additional guidance, a resource library of social media policies from other jurisdictions is provided at the Department of Premier and Cabinet website http://www.advertising.nsw.gov.au/strategic-communications/social-media.

Examples of government use of social media can be found at www.nsw.gov.au/social-media

3 Guidelines for staff

3.1 Use official accounts proactively and responsibly

- Ensure that you have the appropriate authority to use social media in an official capacity, consistent with your agency's code of conduct.
- Be quick to admit and correct mistakes.
- Respect privacy and confidentiality. Only publish information that is permitted by privacy legislation and approved to be in the public domain. Acknowledge copyright and attribute the source of material you share.
- Be a responsible digital citizen. Protect your reputation online and the reputation of your colleagues and your organisation. Be mindful that information posted online is public and permanent. Risks to reputation extend to not only what is published as agency advice or information but how you respond to criticism or abuse.
- Use social media to work together with your customers, community and colleagues.
- Be transparent. Identify yourself as an employee of your agency when discussing work-related issues.

3.2 Use social media in a manner that is consistent with public sector values, legal requirements, related policies, and codes of conduct

- The *Government Sector Employment Act 2013 (the Act)* establishes an ethical framework for a merit-based, apolitical and professional public sector that implements the decisions of the Government of the day. The Act outlines core values for the public sector based on the principles of integrity, trust, service and accountability.
- Make sure you understand the Code of Conduct, and any other relevant policies, for your agency or department. Your conduct online, including use of personal social media accounts, should not adversely reflect on your employer, your

colleagues, or yourself as a public sector employee.

- If you communicate with clients, maintain professional boundaries as you would with other forms of work communication.

3.3 Examples

For examples of guidelines for staff use of social media see:

- Department of Premier and Cabinet Social Media Policy
- Department of Education and Training Social Media Guidelines

4 Sources of Authority

Title
Personnel Handbook
NSW Government ICT Strategy Digital+ 2016
M2012-10 Open Government
NO-12-Standard on records management
NSW Government Open Data Policy
Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009
Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998
Health Records and Information Privacy Act 2002
Government Sector Employment Act 2013
State Records Act 1998
(Agency/Department) Code of Conduct
(Agency/Department) Social Media Policy
(Agency/Department) Acceptable Use of Technology Policy
(Agency/Department) Privacy and Records Management Policy