

# Annapolis Police Department



## GENERAL ORDER

**Number: I.11**

**Issue Date: July  
2014**

**TO:** All Personnel

**SUBJECT:** Social Media Policy

### **PURPOSE**

Social media provides a new and potentially valuable means of assisting the Department and its personnel in meeting community outreach, problem-solving, investigative, crime prevention, and related objectives. This policy identifies potential uses that may be explored or expanded upon as deemed reasonable by administrative and supervisory personnel. The Department also recognizes the role that these tools play in the personal lives of some department personnel. The personal use of social media can have bearing on departmental personnel 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 department personnel.

### **POLICY**

The Department endorses the secure use of social media to enhance communication, collaboration, and information exchange; streamline processes; and foster productivity. This policy establishes this department'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.

### **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, micro-blogging sites, photo and video-sharing sites, wikis, blogs and news sites.

**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.

## **I. ON-THE-JOB USE**

### **A. Department-Sanctioned Presence**

#### **1. Determine the strategy**

- a. Where possible, each social media page shall include an introductory statement that clearly specifies the purpose and scope of the agency's presence on the website.
- b. Where possible, the page(s) should link to the department's official website.
- c. Social media page(s) shall be designed for the target audience(s) such as youth or potential police recruits.

#### **2. Procedures**

- a. All department social media sites or pages shall be approved by the Police Chief or his or her designee and shall be administered by the Public Information Officer or others as directed.
- b. Where possible, social media pages shall clearly indicate they are maintained by the department and shall have department 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 and 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 department.
  1. Pages shall clearly indicate that posted comments will be monitored and that the department 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. Department-Sanctioned Use

- a. Department personnel representing the department, this includes the Public Information Officer and others who may be responsible for posting from time to time, via social media outlets shall do the following:
  1. Conduct themselves at all times as representatives of the department and, accordingly, shall adhere to all department standards of conduct and observe conventionally accepted protocols and proper decorum.
  2. When possible identify themselves as a member of the department.
  3. Not make statements about the guilt or innocence of any suspect or arrestee, or comments concerning pending prosecutions, nor post, transmit, or otherwise disseminate confidential information, including photographs or videos, related to work activity including training, investigations, and other work related activities, without express permission.
  4. Not conduct political activities or private business.
- b. While there are specific unauthorized uses of the internet, the Department also allows limited personal use of the internet, a concept that recognized the reality of the workplace. Occasional personal use is permissible if it is consistent with the Annapolis Police Department's policies and procedures and the usage standards set by the City of Annapolis.
- c. Department personnel use of personally owned devices to manage the department's social media activities or in the course of official duties is prohibited without express permission.
- d. Employees shall observe and abide by all copyright, trademark, and service mark restrictions in posting materials to electronic media.
- e. There is no expectation of privacy in the use of department internet services on Department owned computers. All use of department computers, whether official or personal, is subject to public disclosure laws and can be discoverable in a lawsuit.

### 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 tips;
  - b. offering online-reporting opportunities;
  - c. sharing crime maps and data; and
  - d. soliciting tips about unsolved crimes (i.e., Crime stoppers, 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.

## **II. PERSONAL USE**

### **A. Precautions and Prohibitions**

Notwithstanding state law or binding employment contracts to the contrary, department personnel shall abide by the following when using social media.

1. Department personnel 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 Department 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 Department.
2. As public employees, department personnel are cautioned that speech on- or off-duty, made pursuant to their official duties is not protected under the First Amendment and may form the basis for discipline if deemed detrimental to the Department. Department personnel should assume that their speech and related activity on social media sites will reflect upon their office and the Department.
3. Department personnel 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 Chief or his or her designee. This includes open or closed cases or matters relating to criminal investigations.

4. For safety and security reasons, department personnel are cautioned not to disclose their employment with the Department nor shall they post information pertaining to any other member of the Department without their permission. As such, department personnel are cautioned not to do the following:
  - a. Display department 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 police officer of this department. 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, department personnel should be mindful that their speech becomes part of the worldwide electronic domain. Therefore, adherence to the department's code of conduct is required in the personal use of social media. In particular, department personnel are prohibited from the following:
  - a. Speech containing obscene, racial, degrading 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 department personnel 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.
7. Department personnel 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 this department without express authorization.
8. Department personnel should be aware that they may 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. Department personnel should be aware that privacy settings and social media sites constantly change and they should never assume that personal information posted on such sites is protected.
- 10. Department personnel should expect that any information created, transmitted, downloaded, exchanged, or discussed in a public online forum may be accessed by the Department at any time without prior notice.
- 11. Any employee becoming aware of or having knowledge of a posting or of any website or web page in violation of the provision of this policy shall notify his or her supervisor immediately for follow-up action.

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Michael Pristoop  
Chief of Police

References
1. IACP Model Policy
2. General Order I.7 Use of Department Electronic Mail and Internet
3. CALEA Standards - None

This is a new General Order.