

	LOWER MERION TOWNSHIP POLICE DEPARTMENT Ardmore, Pennsylvania	
	Policy 3.3.5	
Subject:		Distribution:
Social Media		All Personnel
Date of Issue:	Expiration Date:	Rescinds:
06-01-2014	Until Amended or Rescinded	General Order: 13-41
References:		
CALEA: N/A; PLEAC: N/A		
By Authority of:		
		Superintendent of Police

PURPOSE

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 any one particular form of social media, rather, social media in general, as advances in technology continually occur and new tools will emerge in the future.

POLICY

Social media provides a 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 upon appropriate review and approval. 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. This policy provides information of a precautionary nature as well as prohibitions on the use of social media by department personnel.

Nothing in this policy should be construed as limiting an employee's rights under the Whistleblower Act, or duty to report under any local, state or federal statute.

DEFINITIONS

- A. Social Media Outlet: Any Internet-based resource that integrates user-generated content and user participation.

ON-THE-JOB USE

- A. Department-Sanctioned Use

1. Determine strategy

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

2. Procedures

- a.** All department social media outlets shall be approved by the Superintendent of Police, or his/her designee, upon consultation with the Township Manager and the Public Information Officer. Social media outlets and content shall only be developed and administered by personnel designated by the Superintendent of Police and the Chief Technology Officer.
- b.** Where possible, social media outlets shall clearly indicate that they are maintained by the department and shall prominently display department contact information.
- c.** Social media content shall adhere to applicable laws, regulations, department, and township policies, including all information technology and records management policies.
 - 1.** Content is subject to public open records laws. Relevant records retention schedules apply to social media content.
 - 2.** Content must be managed, stored, and retrieved to comply with open records laws and e-discovery laws and policies.
- d.** Where possible, social media content should state that the opinions expressed by visitors do not reflect the opinions of the department.
 - 1.** Content shall clearly indicate that posted comments will be monitored and that the department reserves the right to remove obscenities, off-topic comments, personal attacks, or any comments deemed inappropriate.

3. Official Use

- a.** Department personnel representing the department 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. Identify themselves as a member of the department.
 3. Shall 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 department training, activities, or work-related assignments without express written permission of the Superintendent of Police or his/her designee.
 4. Not conduct political activities or private business.
- b.** Shall observe and abide by all copyright, trademark, and service mark restrictions in posting materials to electronic media regardless of the application.
- c.** Potential Uses
1. Social media is a valuable investigative tool when seeking evidence or information about missing, wanted or endangered persons, gang participation, crimes perpetrated online (i.e., cyber bullying, cyber stalking) and photographs or videos of a crime posted by a participant or an observer.
 2. Social media can be used for community outreach and engagement by providing crime prevention tips, offering online-reporting opportunities, sharing crime maps and data and soliciting tips about unsolved crimes.
 3. Social Media Outlets can be used to make time-sensitive notifications related to road closures, special events, weather emergencies, missing or endangered persons or crime trends.
 4. Social media can be a valuable recruitment tool to attract persons seeking employment and volunteer positions, such as Community Watch.
 5. Background Investigations:
 - a. The Police Department may use electronic social networking outlets when conducting background investigations of job candidates.
 - b. All social media searches for recruiting purposes will be conducted by a non-decision maker. Information pertaining to protected classes will be filtered out prior to sharing any information found online with decision makers.

- c. Persons authorized to search Internet-based content should be deemed as holding a sensitive position.
- d. Search methods shall not involve techniques that are a violation of existing laws.
- e. Vetting techniques shall be applied uniformly to all candidates.

PERSONAL USE

- A.** Department personnel shall abide by the following prohibitions and be mindful of the below precautions 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 this department for which loyalty and confidentiality are important, impede the performance of duties, impair discipline and harmony among coworkers, 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--that is, that owes its existence to the employee's professional duties and responsibilities--is not protected speech 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 this 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 Superintendent of Police or his/her designee.
 4. For safety and security reasons, department personnel are cautioned not to disclose their employment with this department nor shall they post information pertaining to any other member(s) 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 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. Department personnel thus sanctioned are subject to discipline up to and including termination.
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. All Department personnel are prohibited from accessing all personal social media sites while on-duty except when such access is part of their official duties related to criminal and/or background investigations.
9. 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.
10. Reporting violations - 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.

RESPONSIBILITY

It is the responsibility of all supervisory personnel to ensure that all personnel under their immediate supervision comply with this policy.

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