

Government of Alberta

# Social Media Policy

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As approved by the Managing Director of Communications and  
Public Engagement on January 25, 2019

For more information on this policy, please contact the Government of Alberta's Communications and Public Engagement Office (CPE).  
Communications and Public Engagement Office, Government of Alberta

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Social Media Policy

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# Government of Alberta

# Social Media Policy

## 1. Purpose

The Social Media Policy ensures that the Government of Alberta's social media presence is coordinated, consistent and responsive to the needs of the public.

Social media must comply with the Government of Alberta's Communications Policy and with Government Identity and Voice, Tone and Style policies. This policy and the accompanying standards apply to all government social media channels and all use of social media by public servants in official spokesperson capacities.

This policy is administered by the content branch of the Communications and Public Engagement Office (CPE).

## 2. General statement

The government uses social media to support the larger goal of communicating in a clear and direct way with the people of the province.

Our social media will be:

- **AUDIENCE-FOCUSED**  
While accounts may promote government services and information, their primary goal is to give people the information they need.
- **SOCIAL**  
Use will reflect the two-way, conversational nature of social media. Information shared will be appropriate and government will be prepared to answer questions and concerns before posting.
- **RESPONSIVE**  
Public inquiries will be taken as seriously as those received through other channels.
- **NON-PARTISAN**  
Our social media accounts will not share content that promotes or criticizes any political party.
- **COORDINATED**  
Social media will be coordinated across government to avoid duplication and give people clear, consistent and trusted information.

- **ACCESSIBLE**  
No critical information will be stored solely on social media channels. Information shared must also be published elsewhere, such as on Alberta.ca or in print publications.
- **RESPONSIBLE**  
All government social media must adhere to the terms of use defined by each social network.

## 3. Division of responsibilities

### Premier's Office and Cabinet Communications

- Provide leadership in establishing priorities and overall themes of government communications and set direction and manage content for Premier and minister social media channels.

### CPE managing director

- Creates, enforces and approves any changes to the Social Media Policy.

### CPE content branch

- Sets direction and manages content for main government social media channels.
- Under the direction of CPE's managing director, advises on changes to social media policy and standards.
- Approves creation of new accounts.
- Routinely evaluates existing accounts to assess performance, need and compliance with policy.
- Provides strategic advice to communications branches on management of channels and campaigns.
- Provides training for government employees on social media standards and use.
- Provides high-level scans for government, including a daily social media scan and scans for major announcements and campaigns.

### CPE communications branches

- Set direction and manage content for department and issue-specific channels.
- Identify opportunities to support department initiatives.
- Work with client areas to ensure that strategies and products meet communications goals.
- Provide day-to-day social media scans for department needs and flag emerging issues with the content branch.

## 4. Spokesperson use of social media

Employees responsible for managing social media accounts are considered government spokespeople and must be approved by the communications director assigned to their department.

Employees managing social media channels must be trained by CPE's content branch before beginning their duties, unless they have recent experience managing another government social media channel, and have been provided a waiver from CPE content. Contractors appointed to manage social media projects may also be required to have this training.

Government spokespeople using social media for official purposes must identify themselves as such in their account descriptions and take steps to ensure that their posts remain appropriate and professional.

## 5. Accounts

Approval for accounts is required from both the communications branch and CPE's executive director of Outreach.

The CPE content branch maintains a social media proposal template that can be found online on the social media standards page. It must be completed before a new account can be launched. The relevant communications branch should first be consulted so it can guide the planning process.

Once a proposal is completed, the communications branch will provide feedback, coordinating with the content branch as necessary. The account must make good use of resources and align with government's social media strategy. Accounts will be approved only after all feedback is addressed.

When approvals are in place, the content branch will work with the communications branch on implementation details. If approval is not granted, they will jointly recommend a revised strategy to achieve the goals identified.

Approval is an ongoing process, rather than a one-time event. Accounts will be evaluated regularly and strategy and/or goals may be updated. Accounts no longer meeting an active communications need will be deleted.

## 6. Account management

To ensure that government communications are consistent and public inquiries get a prompt response, all social media accounts and employees managing them must use any systems prescribed by CPE content.

The content branch maintains additional standards that govern account management. They can be accessed by Government of Alberta employees at <https://www.alberta.ca/goa/standards/social-media.aspx>.

### Government identity and brand management

Consistent branding helps people recognize official government accounts.

All accounts and visuals must comply with the Government Identity Policy and the Voice, Tone and Style Guide and with any additional standards created by the content branch.

Organizations at arm's length from government, such as agencies, boards and commissions, are not required to follow the Government Identity Policy. They may be required to develop corporate identity components if they do not exist, to ensure that they are visually distinct from government.

### Posting content

All posted content must comply with the Government of Alberta Communications Policy. It must also:

- Be appropriate for public distribution, with no foreseeable, significant security or privacy risk posed by sharing. Information not already public must be approved for release by the appropriate authority.
- Be consistent with the account's stated goals.
- Be non-partisan.
- Contain only government information and official positions – not a spokesperson's personal views.
- Include only content owned by the government or licensed content that allows for worldwide, free, non-exclusive access.
- Not contain any critical information not available on the government's website or in a news release.
- Be accessible. Writing must be clear and simple. Captions for videos must be hard-coded so they can be easily understood by people with visual impairments.

The CPE content branch maintains a social media brief template that government employees can find online on the social media standards page. It must accompany campaigns and plans that use social media as a major component. The brief outlines goals, approach, suggested content and design needs.

## Sharing third-party content

Government accounts may share content posted by other accounts or on third-party websites, including other governments, municipalities, law enforcement agencies and other government partners.

When communicating about government programs and services, original posts and links to government-owned assets (news releases, websites) should be used where possible. Third-party content should only be shared if it clearly adds value.

Reasonable efforts must be made to ensure that shared third-party content is accurate. Where possible, information should be shared directly from the original source (municipality, lead agency, etc.).

Sharing third-party content can be seen as endorsement. Posts that incorporate the original writer's opinions or views may be shared only if such endorsement is appropriate and warranted.

Third parties whose works may be posted to social media by government must provide advance written consent. Permission is not required to share content publicly available online or to share a post by another social media user, as long as the source is clearly attributed.

## Moderating comments

The CPE content branch maintains commenting rules for government social media channels. These rules tell people what to expect when they interact with our channels and under what circumstances their access may be suspended temporarily. The content branch also maintains additional standards for employees moderating social media comments that outline timeframes for response and other requirements. These can be accessed by Government of Alberta employees at <https://www.alberta.ca/goa/standards/social-media.aspx>.

Comments and questions received through government channels will be responded to promptly.

## Restricting access to government channels

The government will not unduly prevent someone from getting government information through our social media channels. However, to effectively use social media as a communications tool, we must maintain online environments where everyone feels safe to ask questions and join conversations.

Access to government social media pages may be suspended temporarily for users who repeatedly violate our commenting rules.

Users may not be denied access to a government social media page simply because of the length or frequency of their comments or the opinions they contain.



## Copyright and intellectual property

The government will abide by the terms of the *Copyright Act* concerning fair use of its own intellectual property. CPE's content branch will intervene if government online content is repurposed in a way that may not be considered fair use, or if visual trademarks are used inappropriately by third parties.

# 7. Protecting privacy and personal information

Personal information is defined as:

- any information that may be used to positively identify an individual – including full name, email address or other details
- any recorded information about an identifiable individual

The collection and use of personal or identifying information by the government on social media is governed by the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* (FOIP). The government will not collect, record or share personal information not permitted by this legislation.

The government will use only social media channels that have privacy policies/regulations which comply with FOIP requirements.

The Government of Alberta will not ask employees managing social media channels to disclose their own personal information.

## Use of social media to collect personal information

The government may use social media to collect statistical data or aggregate information about its programs, services or marketing efforts, or to monitor public opinion about issues concerning government. There will be no attempt to identify the specific author or contributor of any individual content unless doing so is permitted by law.

Personal information provided by individuals through social media channels will be collected only if that information relates directly to, and is necessary for, an operating program or activity or is required by law.

Any social media channel collecting identifying personal information about visitors or contributors must display a Notice of Collection, in accordance with section 34 of the *FOIP Act*. This notice must include the purpose and legal authority for the collection and the title, business address and business telephone number of an employee who can answer questions.

Any planned collection of personal information through social media must first be vetted by FOIP staff. They will conduct a privacy scan or privacy impact statement as warranted and prepare a Notice of Collection if needed.

## 8. Advertising

All paid social media advertising is subject to the Advertising Standards Policy.

All department requests for social media advertising must be directed through communications branches, which will then coordinate with CPE marketing services. CPE's content branch must be informed before a plan for social media advertising is created. This includes instances where social media products are created as part of a larger advertising campaign, whether by communications staff or a third-party agency.

If a proposed social media advertising campaign involves use of the main government channels, CPE's content branch must be notified a minimum of two weeks in advance of the desired launch date.

The communications branch requesting the advertising is responsible for ensuring that responses are provided for questions or complaints. The account holder is responsible for moderating comments and posting responses as necessary.

Social media advertising will not be scheduled to run outside regular business hours unless arrangements have been made for comment moderation.

## 9. Elections

During a general election or byelection, content may only be posted to government channels if allowed under the Government of Alberta's Election Communication Policy.

## 10. Emergencies

Emergency information will be shared through the main government channels.

An affected municipality and/or lead agency is considered the primary source of local information for residents during an emergency. Government accounts will share key posts and content and will also post provincial information as needed.

During an emergency, crisis communications will take priority over posts dedicated to routine government business.

