

POLICY LOCATION	Community Development	POLICY TITLE	Social Media Policy
POLICY NUMBER	CS/14/14	DATE ADOPTED	May 2022
REVISION NUMBER	3	REVISION DATE	February 2025

Purpose

This policy is to provide guidance and expand on the existing obligations of Councillors, Staff, Volunteers and Contractors under the Code of Conduct when engaging in Social Media when there is a direct or inferred relationship between the user and the Buloke Shire Council.

Social media provides opportunities to enhance community connection and to encourage online conversations through the exploration and consideration of diverse thoughts and views. It is intended to provide guidance, encourage the use of Social Media and give them the confidence to participate safely when actively seeking ideas, questions, complaints and feedback from the public. We encourage open conversation, debate and expect participants to behave in a respectful manner.

Scope

This policy applies to all Councillors, Employees, Volunteers and Contractors and sets the standards and requirements applicable for Council's professional use of Social Media as well as professional and personal interactions via Social Media when used in their:

- Professional capacity, in the course of fulfilling their functions and duties to Council; and
- Personal capacity, where that use is a stated or implied connected with, or might otherwise impact on, Council, its reputation and/or its effectiveness, including when such use occurs outside of office hours.

Council acknowledges that individuals have a right to exercise judgment in the private use of Social Media for their own personal expression or activities. Therefore, this policy is not intended to cover situations where:

- Information is circulated in a Councillor's or staff member's personal capacity and not on behalf of, or in connection with, Council;
- Use of Social Media in situations where there is no reference to Buloke Shire Council, its Councillors, staff, policies and decisions, services, suppliers or any other stakeholders or Council related matters;
- Use of Social Media where such use occurs outside of normal working hours.

This policy is to be read in conjunction with all Buloke Shire Council policies including the Buloke Shire Council Code of Conduct for Staff and the Buloke Shire Code of Conduct for Councillors.

Definitions

Social media is a group of online applications designed to allow information to be created, shared, discussed and disseminated. Social media includes the sites, tools, channels and engagement platforms used to publish content and promote connections and conversations. “Social media” includes but is not limited to:

Social networking sites	(e.g. Facebook, LinkedIn, Yammer, Twitter, Pinterest, WeChat)
Video and photo sharing websites	This includes use of QR-code tagging (e.g. YouTube, Instagram, Flickr, Vimeo, Periscope, Vine and Youku)
Blogs and vlogs	This includes those hosted by social channels or media outlets (e.g. Tumblr, ‘comments’ or ‘your say’ features on websites)
Online collaborations	(e.g. Wikipedia)
Forums, discussion boards and groups	This includes Microsoft Teams for internal and enabled chat functions (e.g. Google groups, Reddit, Whirlpool)
Podcasting	This included nonfiction narrative, interviews and/or conversational, hybrid and scripted fiction
Instant messaging	(e.g. WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger)
Chat rooms	(e.g. Chatiw, Chatroulette.com, Talk.Chat)
Geo-spatial tagging	This includes use of QR-codes (e.g. Google maps, Foursquare)
Online gaming platforms	(e.g. Gamification apps, Fortnite, Second life, Pokémon Go)
Other	Any other tool or emerging technology that allows individuals to publish or communicate in a digital environment
Authorised Staff	Are defined as staff that have received approval from the Chief Executive Officer to officially represent the Buloke Shire Council via Social Media technology
Staff	Includes all Employees, Volunteers or Contractors engaged by Council
Official social media account or group	Is defined as an account or group which managed by and monitored by Council officers, represents operations of Buloke Shire Council, has Strategic Marketing and Communications endorsement to use Buloke Shire Council logos, names or other official identifier/s. Official Council platforms include but are not limited to: Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Twitter, Zoom and Microsoft Teams.

Policy Statement

Council recognises that use of Social Media is increasingly becoming a common standard of communication in professional and personal activities.

As new Social Media platforms emerge there are new opportunities for dynamic and engaging two-way communications that can complement existing communication and further improve information, and delivery of key services, strategic projects and programs to supplement conventional consultation methods.

Council and its staff recognise the potential for risk to Council’s reputation and image arising from the misuse of Social Media in a professional or personal capacity. Accordingly, Councillors and

Council staff are beholden by, and recognise, the requirements and behaviours within the Buloke Shire Council Code of Conduct and Council policies when participating in Social Media activities in an official or private capacity to ensure that the risk of such damage is minimised.

Guidelines

General and Personal Use

1. The Human Resources team, in conjunction with the Manager Customer Engagement, are responsible to ensure staff are provided with information and guidance relating to acceptable use of Social Media
2. Councillors and staff are responsible to familiarise themselves with, and adhere to, the requirements within this policy as amended from time to time
3. Councillors and staff are personally responsible for any information or comments made using Social Media. Information published via Social Media is often permanently available and may be reproduced in other media
4. Councillors and staff must not make any comments or post any material that might result in damage to Council's reputation or otherwise bring it into disrepute
5. Councillors and staff are responsible to ensure that all online activity complies with Council's policies
6. Staff must not mislead users by implying they have been authorised to represent Council either through the use of a Council issued email address, use of Council's corporate logo, use of the identity of another Council staff member, or any other action which may give the impression of Council's support or approval of Social Media activities
7. Staff are responsible to ensure that their work performance is not affected by their use of Social Media, including through frequent or prolonged use of Social Media outside of designated work breaks.

Professional Use

When using Social Media as a representative of Council, Councillors and staff are expected to:

1. Reinforce the integrity, reputation and values of Buloke Shire Council
2. Adhere to Buloke Shire Council codes of conduct, policies and procedures
3. Comply with relevant laws and regulations
4. Ensure confidentiality of Council information
5. Behave with caution, courtesy, honesty and respect
6. Seek prior advice from Manager Customer Engagement.

The following content is not permitted under any circumstances:

1. Abusive, profane or sexual language
2. Content not relating to the subject matter of that blog, board, forum or site
3. Content which is false or misleading
4. Confidential information about Council or third parties
5. Copyright or Trademark protected materials

6. Discriminatory material in relation to a person or group based on age, colour, creed, disability, family status, gender, nationality, marital status, parental status, political opinion/affiliation, pregnancy or potential pregnancy, race or social origin, religious beliefs/activity, responsibilities, sex or sexual orientation, or suppresses someone's sexual orientation or gender identity.
7. Illegal material or materials designed to encourage law breaking
8. Materials that could compromise Council, employee or system safety
9. Materials which would breach applicable laws (defamation, privacy, trade practices, financial rules and regulations, fair use, trademarks).
10. Material that would offend contemporary standards of taste and decency
11. Material which would bring the Council into disrepute
12. Personal details or references to Councillors, council staff or third parties, which may breach privacy laws
13. Spam, meaning the distribution of unsolicited bulk electronic messages
14. Statements which may be considered to be bullying or harassment.
15. Statements that breach human rights

Authorisation

Ensure appropriate authorisation has been obtained before using social media including but not limited to uploading content and acting as a spokesperson on behalf of Council.

Expertise

Do not comment outside your area of expertise. Do not commit Council to actions or undertakings.

Disclosure

Only discuss publicly available information. Do not disclose confidential information, internal discussions or decisions of Council, employees or third parties. This includes publishing confidential, personal or private information where there is sufficient detail for potential identification of Councillors, staff or third parties.

Accuracy

Be accurate, constructive, helpful and informative. Correct any errors as soon as practicable. Do not publish information or make statements which you know to be false or may reasonably be taken to be misleading or deceptive.

Identity

Be clear about professional identity or any vested interests. Do not use fictitious names or identities that deliberately intend to deceive, mislead or lie. Do not participate anonymously or covertly via a third party or agency.

Opinion

Clearly separate personal opinions from professional ones and be mindful of Council's Code of Conduct when discussing or commenting on Council matters. In general, don't express personal opinions using Council # tags or other identifications, or have Council logos on clothing/wear visible

in images. Only where this is not possible, consider using a formal disclaimer to separate official Council positions from personal opinions and distance Council from comments made by public and other outside interests.

Privacy

Be sensitive to the privacy of others. Seek permission from anyone who appears in any photographs, video or other footage before sharing these via any form of Social Media. If asked to remove materials do so as soon as practicable.

Intellectual Property

Seek permission from the creator or copyright owner, to use or reproduce copyright material including applications, audio tracks (speeches, songs), footage (video), graphics (graphs, charts and logos), images, artwork, photographs, publications or music. Also seek permission before publishing or uploading material in which the intellectual property rights, such as Trademarks, are owned by a third party e.g. company logos. Seek permission from the website's owner wherever possible before linking to another site (including a Social Media application). Seek approval from the relevant authority before publishing photos of crown land or areas and where prior approval of indigenous representatives is required.

Defamation

Do not comment, contribute, create, forward, post, upload or share content that is malicious or defamatory. This includes statements which may negatively impact the reputation of another.

Reward

Do not publish content in exchange for reward of any kind.

Transparency

Do not seek to buy or recompense favourable social media commentary. Encourage online publishers to be open and transparent in how they engage with, or review council personnel, services or wares.

Political Bias

Do not endorse any political affinity or allegiance.

Respect

Always be courteous, patient and respectful of others' opinions, including detractors.

Discrimination

Be mindful of anti-discrimination laws and do not publish statements or information which may be discriminatory.

Language

Be mindful of language and expression.

State of Mind

Do not use Social Media when inebriated, irritated, upset or tired.

Be Safe

Protect your personal privacy and guard against identity theft.

Media

Do not issue statements or make announcements through Social Media channels unless authorised. Do not respond directly if approached by media for comment through Social Media. Refer the inquiry to the Manager Customer Engagement.

Modification and Moderation

Ensure that any Social Media sites created or contributed to can be readily edited, improved or removed and appropriately moderated.

Access

Be mindful of the requisite government web standards for accessibility. Information made available via non-compliant platforms should be made accessible in another form where practical.

Responsiveness

Specify the type of comments and feedback that will receive a response and clearly communicate a target response time. Make it easy for audiences to reach Council via other methods by publishing Council's phone number, generic email, Facebook, Zoom, Teams and Twitter accounts.

Accountability and Responsibility

Role Responsibilities

Councillors	Seek approval for Council branding of Social Media
	Register Social Media account/tools/site with the Manager Customer Engagement
	Understand and comply with the provisions in this policy
	Seek training and development for using Social Media
	If implementing or using a Social Media account that implies a connection to Council (e.g. Cr John Citizen), seek advice from the Chief Executive Officer or Manager Customer Engagement if unsure about applying the provisions of this policy
	Seek approval from relevant manager for business strategy incorporating social media
	Seek advice from Manager Customer Engagement on using Social Media and developing a communications plan to support business strategy
	Seek approval for Council branding of Social Media
	Register Social Media account/tools/site with the Manager Customer Engagement
	Understand and comply with the provisions in this policy

	Seek advice from the Manager Human Resources or Manager Customer Engagement if unsure about applying the provisions of this policy
	Ensure contractors are provided with a copy of this policy
	Familiarise self with the End User Licence Agreements of any external Social Media tools being used

Business Unit Managers	Approve business strategy incorporating use of Social Media
	Ensure staff consult the Manager Customer Engagement on their planned use of Social Media
	Ensure contractors are provided with a copy of the Social Media policy
	Offer training for staff using Social Media
	Advise Information Technology team of approval to access Social Media for business purposes

Information Technology Team	Facilitate secure access to support delivery of Council business via Social Media
	Regularly back up and archive internally hosted Social Media sites

Manager Customer Engagement	Authorise use of Social Media tools for conducting Council business
	Maintain Social Media records
	Provide advice and assist with the development of communication plans using Social Media
	Educate Councillors and staff about this policy and their responsibilities when using Social Media
	Advise appropriate precautions e.g. disclaimers
	Maintain a register of Social Media being used for conducting Council business including records of the business case for using Social Media, its strategic imperative, the intended administrator, URL, login, password and audience
	Assist staff to retain some record explaining the context or purpose of Social Media, and a sample of posts where it is impractical to retain large volumes of screen grabs
	Monitor Social Media accounts/tools/sites registered for conducting Council business
	Monitor Social Media for references to the Buloke Shire Council
	Seek legal advice as appropriate where an issue is likely to be contentious or may create legal risk for Council
	Conduct a desktop review of this policy annually

Enforcement

All content published or communicated by or on behalf of Buloke Shire Council using Social Media must be recorded (including the author's name, date, time, media site location and link) and kept on record.

Buloke Shire Council actively monitors Social Media for relevant contributions that impact on the municipality, its operations and reputation. Buloke Shire Council will be able to find – and act upon – contributions made by Councillors and staff if deemed necessary.

This policy will be published and promoted to Councillors and staff of Buloke Shire Council.

Breaching this policy may result in disciplinary action, performance management and review. Serious breaches may result in suspension or termination of employment or association.

Buloke Shire Council reserves the right to remove, where possible, content that violates this policy or any associated policies.

Legislation and Regulations

This policy was developed in accordance with the following legislation:

- *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*
- *Copyright Act 1958 (Vic)*
- *Crimes Act 1958*
- *Defamation Act 2005 (Vic)*
- *Disability Discrimination Act 1992*
- *Equal Opportunity Act 2010*
- *Fair Trading Act 2009 (Cth)*
- *Fair Work Act 2009*
- *Freedom of Information Act 1982 (Vic)*
- *Information Privacy Act 2000 (Vic)*
- *Local Government Act 2020*
- *Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004*
- *Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014*
- *Public Records Act 1973 (Vic)*
- *Racial and Religious Tolerance Act 2001*
- *Racial Discrimination Act 1975*
- *Sex Discrimination Act 1984*
- *Spam Act 2003 (Cth)*
- *Wrongs Act 1958 (Vic)*

This policy was developed in accordance with the following documents:

- Buloke Shire Council Electronic Communication Policy
- Buloke Shire Council Information Security Policy
- Buloke Shire Council Enterprise Agreement
- Buloke Shire Council Councillor Code of Conduct
- Buloke Shire Council Staff Code of Conduct

- Buloke Shire Council Performance Management Policy
- Buloke Shire Council Bullying, Equal Opportunity, Discrimination, Sexual Harassment Policy

State Services Authority: Guidance for the use of Social Media in the Victorian Public Sector (18 August 2010).

Further information

If you require any further information or help interpreting parts of this policy, please contact Council's Manager Customer Engagement.

Policy Review

This Policy will be monitored continuously to ensure its relevance in terms of community needs and expectations, Council goals and statutory requirements. The policy will be reviewed on an ongoing basis and amended as required.

Monitoring of Social Media will be provided by:

- Internal audits
- Public consultation and feedback