



ACT
Government

Social Media Guidelines for Personal Use

Office of Industrial Relations and
Workforce Safety

Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate (CMTEDD)

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Social Media Guidelines for Personal Use

Purpose

1. These guidelines provide advice for ACT Public Service (ACTPS) employees and ACT Public Sector members ('**Public Employees**')¹ on how to navigate personal social media use, including best practice principles.
2. These guidelines also provide advice for balancing the right to personal and political expression and the responsibilities that come with being a public employee.

Introduction

3. Public employees are encouraged to consider the [ACTPS Values](#) and the need to maintain the apolitical nature of the service.
4. Public employees have the right to personal and political expression but are advised to consider that their personal social media use can have a connection with their work and are advised to mitigate the risk of social media use impacting their employment relationships.
5. Being a member of the ACTPS or ACT Public Sector means that the way a public employee uses social media not only reflects on the individual, but it also has the potential to impact the reputation of the Service.
6. When engaging in social media, public employees must:
 - a. know and reflect on the standard of conduct laid out by the [ACTPS Values](#) and [ACTPS Code of Conduct](#);
 - b. ensure any social media activity that could have a connection to their work is undertaken in accordance with the [ACTPS Values](#) and [ACTPS Code of Conduct](#); and
 - c. ensure that a conflict of interest with their official role does not arise.

What is Social Media?

7. **Social Media** is online services, tools and applications used for publishing, sharing and discussing information. This can include but is not limited to SMS, email, online collaboration tools, comments sections, wikis, mobile apps, social networking websites and any other technology that allows individual users to upload, comment on, like and share content.
8. **Official use** of social media includes use of any of the above technologies for work purposes as well as communication carried out from one of the ACT Government's official social media channels for government-related business, or when commenting from a public employee's private account as an ACT Government representative.
9. **Personal use** of social media refers to the use of social media by public employees in any capacity other than work purposes. It is important to note that in some circumstances personal use can have a connection to work and a public employee's employment relationship with the service.

¹ Public employee(s) means an officer, temporary employee, casual employee, public sector member, senior executive member, board and committee members and contractors or consultants exercising a function of a public sector entity.

Application

10. These guidelines have been developed for whole-of-government use and are issued by the Head of Service under section 17(2)(a) of the [Public Sector Management Act 1994](#) (PSM Act). The guidelines bind all staff engaged under the PSM Act and all public sector employers within the meaning of section 152(1)(a) of the PSM Act.
11. These guidelines are intended to have a broad application and apply to any person who is part of the ACTPS and ACT Public Sector.
12. To remove doubt, these guidelines apply to all public employees as defined in the [Legislation Act 2001](#).
13. For the purpose of these guidelines, **public employee(s)** means an officer, temporary employee, casual employee, public sector member, senior executive member, board and committee members and contractors or consultants exercising a function of a public sector entity.
14. For guidance on the prohibited and permitted uses of ACT Government owned software and hardware please see the [Acceptable Use of Information and communications technology \(ICT\) Resources Policy](#) ('the Acceptable Use Policy').

Key Legislative Provisions

15. Public employees are bound by the [ACTPS Code of Conduct](#), [ACTPS Values and Signature Behaviours](#) and the [Respect, Equity and Diversity \(RED\) Framework](#).
16. The PSM Act includes a principle at Division 2.1 (Public sector standards) that in any activity that has a connection work, a public employee must act in accordance with the public sector values of respect, integrity, collaboration and innovation.
17. As per section 151 of the PSM Act, these guidelines are not intended to impact the exercise of independent statutory functions.
18. These guidelines are to be considered in line with, and not infringe upon, the workplace rights afforded to all ACTPS employees under relevant acts and instruments such as the *Fair Work Act 2009*. Any ambiguity arising from the interpretation of these guidelines should be resolved on a reading which broadly construes these rights.

Personal Use

19. As members of the ACTPS and ACT Public Sector, public employees have responsibilities in accordance with the ACTPS Values and Code of Conduct. Interactions and actions need to maintain the view that public employees are trusted and impartial public servants. These responsibilities extend into our personal interactions and actions when using social media.
20. Inappropriate engagement or commentary on social media may include, but not limited to;
 - a. Use of offensive language or making disrespectful comments about a colleague or member of the public;
 - b. Making comments regarding cultural sensitivities;
 - c. Using dating apps to target colleagues; and
 - d. Using social media to arrange activities to undermine the integrity and reputation of the service.

Connection to work

21. In order to maintain the apolitical nature of the ACTPS and ACT Public Sector, public employees are advised to refrain from expressing, demonstrating or supporting/liking political views where a link to their employment may arise.
22. The closer the topic is to a public employee's work, directorate/agency or Minister, the greater the risk it can pose to public confidence in the ACTPS and ACT Public Sector.
23. The impacts and consequences of a connection to work arising in the context of public employee's personal use of social media depend on the circumstances of the individual case. In serious cases, misconduct processes may be appropriate.
24. To mitigate the risks of personal social media use, public employees should have regard to:
 - a. their own privacy and security if disclosing their employment details on social media;
 - b. their responsibility to maintain the integrity and impartiality of the ACT Public Service and broader ACT Public Sector;
 - c. the risk of a connection to their work and employment relationship, especially if their personal social media use includes the expression of personal views or opinions on areas of Government policy or if they engage with content that falls outside the norms of acceptable social behaviour;
 - d. reporting any conduct on social media by public employees that is inconsistent with the ACTPS Values to management and considering any other responsibilities with respect to reporting that may apply to them as a consumer of a social media;
 - e. their responsibility to follow proper processes if they need to raise an issue or complaint with management and not express grievances or issues on social media in ways that may be inconsistent with the ACTPS Values.
25. If an issue arises with respect to personal or official social media use, public employees are entitled to procedural fairness.
26. Public employees should consider the importance of communicating in a manner that is consistent with the ACTPS Values during any process to resolve the issue.

Use of Disclaimer

27. Public employees should consider including a disclaimer in their personal social media profile which indicates that all views expressed are their own and do not represent their directorate/agency, Minister, the ACTPS or the ACT Government.
28. However, even if a disclaimer is included, a connection to a public employee's work may arise if their behaviour or expression is inconsistent with the ACTPS Values and Code of Conduct and the fact they are a member of the ACTPS or ACT Public Sector becomes known.
29. Where a public employee has included a disclaimer or is using an alias or their employment relationship with the Territory is not known, the integrity of the ACTPS and ACT Public Sector can be damaged if they engage in content that falls outside the norms of acceptable social behaviour such as:
 - a. hate speech, threats or encouragement of violence of harassment, or personal attacks or derogatory comments about individuals or groups within the community.

Responsibilities

30. When using social media for personal use in any capacity, public employees should:

- a. ensure their conduct is in accordance with ACTPS Values and the Code of Conduct;
- b. ensure there is no conflict of interest with their official role;
- c. avoid expressing or supporting political views where a link to their employment may arise;
- d. report any conduct on social media by public employees that is inconsistent with the ACTPS Values:
 - i. to their manager or directorate reporting mechanism
 - ii. to the extent that the conduct falls outside the norms of acceptable social behaviour report incidents to administrators/moderators of the relevant platform.
- e. never publish information that should not be made public. Section 9(d)(i) of the PSM Act and section 135 of the *Crimes Act 1990* state that it is an offence for public servants to publish or communicate any information gained throughout their job without lawful authority to do so with a maximum penalty of up to 2 years imprisonment; and
- f. never provide personal information about individuals to third-parties without their consent. The email address of colleagues or stakeholders and other identifiable information must be treated with discretion and care. Employees must not upload contact details from directorate (Outlook) contacts when using, or prompted by, external social networking sites.

Consultation

- 31. This guideline was developed in consultation with OIRWS, ACTPS People Forum, the Communications and Engagement Division CMTEDD, the Territory Records Office CMTEDD and unions.

References

- 32. The key principles of this guidance are aligned with the following authorised sources:
 - a. [Public Sector Management Act 1994](#)
 - b. [Public Sector Management Standards 2016](#)
 - c. [Public Sector Management Standards 2006 \(repealed\)](#)
 - d. [Fair Work Act 2009](#)
 - e. [ACTPS Conflict of Interest](#)
 - f. [ACTPS Code of Conduct](#)
 - g. [ACTPS Enterprise Agreements](#)
 - h. [Territory Records Act 2002](#)
 - i. [Freedom of Information Act 2016](#)
 - j. [Standards for Records, Information and Data](#)
 - k. [Acceptable Use of ICT Resources Policy](#)
 - l. [Directorate and agency-specific Information Privacy Policies and Notes](#)
 - m. [Social media: Guidance for Australian Public Service Employees and Agencies](#)

Further Information

- 1. For further information on these guidelines, please contact OIRWS at eba@act.gov.au.

2. For queries relating to suspicious approaches via personal or ACT Government social media accounts, please contact JACS Security and Emergency Management Division at JACSEMD@act.gov.au.

Review

These guidelines are due for review 3 years from the last issued or reviewed date, or earlier where there are changes that affect the operation of these guidelines.

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Approval Authority

This guideline is approved by:

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Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate
On behalf of the Head of Service
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