

DRAFT

Alaska Legislature Social Media Policy

Social media can be a powerful tool to communicate with and engage constituents as well as to facilitate the exchange of ideas with other entities. Many people depend on internet sources, including social media, for news, collaboration and networking. Due to the ubiquitous use of these technologies, it is prudent for the Alaska State Legislature to adopt a policy governing the appropriate use of social media for legislators, legislative agencies, and their staff when using state resources to access or maintain social media accounts.

- I. Content policy: The use of social media should further the mission of the Alaska State Legislature or legislative agency while adhering to Alaska's Legislative Ethics Act.
 - a. Content distributed by the Legislature's social media accounts should serve a legislative purpose, for example:
 - Citizen outreach, education and engagement, including a description of services provided by the agency;
 - Information on issues before the legislature;
 - Reports of actions taken by the legislature or agency; or
 - Notification of items of importance to the community, district or state.
 - b. The following content is prohibited:
 - Information unrelated to legislative discourse or which is defamatory, obscene, threatening or which incites lawless action or illegal conduct.
 - Posting information that is campaign related, including invitations and announcements of political fundraisers; posts that express support for a candidate, ballot measure group, or Political Action Committee (PAC).
 - Posting information that is confidential; and
 - Any action that provides a private benefit to any person or organization, including solicitations, endorsements, or promotions of products or services of any financial, commercial, non-profit, or non-governmental agency.
- II. Comment Policy: Social media accounts maintained by legislative entities shall not allow comments to be posted that contain prohibited content. It is the responsibility of the account holder to ensure that commenting is either not allowed or monitored to ensure compliance. If possible, a visible disclaimer should be placed on the account noting that certain content is prohibited and may be removed without prior notice to the commenter.
- III. Messaging Policy: Messaging features of a social media account shall not be used for any communications to conduct official state business.
- IV. Use for Hiring Purposes Policy: Use of social media to recruit and research potential job applicants shall be allowed, however an applicant cannot be compelled to reveal personal information, such as a password, or allow access to an account that is more than what is available to a public user of the social media.

- V. Employee Use Policy: Employees may be authorized to use social media for legislative and/or limited personal or incidental use at the discretion of their supervisor. During business hours, personal and incidental uses of social media shall be limited to avoid conflicts or interference with legislative duties and responsibilities. Excessive personal use of social media during business hours is prohibited. Each office or agency that allows employees to use social media is encouraged to adopt a policy regarding whether and how much access to personal social media accounts will be allowed.
- VI. Agency Social Media Accounts Policy: A nonpartisan agency of the legislature shall not create a publicly visible social media account or page without prior approval by Legislative Council.
- VII. Social Media Guidelines Policy: In order to ensure current best practices are followed, Legislative Council shall provide Social Media Guidelines to communicate guiding principles as a reference for legislators and legislative employees when maintaining a social media presence.

Alaska Legislature Social Media Guidelines

These are the official guidelines for the use of social media at the Alaska State Legislature. The purpose of these guidelines is to communicate best practices and considerations for maintaining a social media presence that is useful, informational, ethical, and represents the mission of the Alaska State Legislature.

Guidelines for accounts: Emerging platforms for online collaboration are fundamentally changing the way we work, offering new ways to engage with constituents and the world at large. It's a new model for interaction that can help you to build stronger, more successful relationships with coworkers, constituents and the general public. Carefully considering how you enter into this relationship is integral to success. A few points to consider:

- Ultimately, the legislator or agency director will be held responsible for posts. Legislator or agency director: Be clear with staff that will be publishing on your behalf what your goals are in using social media. Staff: Be sure that you have authorization to post and that your posts correctly represent what the legislator or agency director wants to convey.
- Public discourse and discussion about issues is one of the great benefits of social media. People are often quick to offer their opinions and feedback – but not all comments are appropriate, respectful and follow the legislature's adopted policy. When you set up your social media accounts, check to see what control, if any, you have over the comments that are posted. Can you delete individual comments? Block comments from a persistently offensive poster? Change settings so that only posts that you approve appear on your account? Who will be responsible for reviewing the posts and enforcing the policy? How often will the posts be reviewed? You might choose to disallow comments altogether in order to ensure that nothing offensive or inappropriate is posted. Different platforms and different account types allow differing amounts of control – a little research before you set up your account may keep you from having to start over later.
- If the social media program you are using has an area to publish information about the account holder, consider publishing a disclaimer outlining policies for your account and noting the items that are beyond your control. For example:

Welcome to the Facebook page of Legislator John Doe. I appreciate your opinions and encourage respectful, political discourse. Before you comment, please be aware that your comments are publicly accessible - do not post personal information that you want to keep private. Any comments which are off-topic, offensive or would violate any of the Alaska State Legislature's ethics policies, including any campaign related posts, may be removed without notice and may result in the suspension of the privilege to post information. Some of the content on this page – such as advertisements – are exclusively generated by Facebook and are not endorsed by my legislative office.

Guidelines for publishing: Golden Rule: Think twice, post once.

Once posted, an item can instantly be distributed throughout the internet to be reposted by other users. When you are thinking in terms of 140 characters or current status, it is easy to forget that posts are permanent. Before publishing an item, take time to consider the following:

Be Responsible. What you write is ultimately your responsibility. Participation in social computing is not a right but an opportunity, so please treat it seriously and with respect. Please know and follow these guidelines, the Alaska Legislature's Computer Acceptable Use Policy, the Alaska Legislature Social Media Policy and Alaska's Legislative Ethics Act and any other policies which concern appropriate behavior within the Legislature.

Be honest. Your honesty (or dishonesty) will be quickly noticed in the social media environment. If you are blogging about your work, use your real name, and organization, and be clear about your role. If you have a vested interest in something you are discussing, point it out. Transparency is about your identity and relationships.

Be careful. Make sure your efforts to be transparent don't violate privacy, confidentiality, or legal guidelines. What you publish is widely accessible and will be around for a long time, so consider the content carefully.

Be informative. There are millions of words out there. The best way to get yours read is to write things that people will value. Social communication should add value. It should be thought-provoking and build a sense of community. If it helps people improve knowledge or solve problems—then it's adding value.

Be respectful: Post meaningful, respectful comments—in other words, no spam, no remarks that are off-topic, and no offensive or inappropriate language. Political discourse can quickly devolve into disrespectful speech and personal attacks—your courteous treatment of dissenting opinions sets the tone for healthy debate.

Correct errors quickly. If you make a mistake, admit it. Be upfront and be quick with your correction. If you're posting to a blog, and choose to modify an earlier post—make it clear that you have done so.

Write what you know. Make sure you write and post about your areas of expertise.

Perception is reality. In online social networks, the lines between public and private, personal and professional are blurred. Just by identifying yourself as a state employee or elected official, you are creating perceptions about your expertise. Be sure that all content associated with you is consistent with your work and with the Legislature's professional standards.

If it gives you pause, then stop. If you're about to publish something that makes you even the slightest bit uncomfortable, don't shrug it off and hit 'send.' Take a minute to review the material, try to figure out what's bothering you, and then fix it. If you're still unsure, you might want to discuss it with your supervisor in the case of an employee or Leadership in the case of a Legislator. Ultimately, what you publish is yours—as is the responsibility. So be sure.

Be ethical. Do not publish anything related to political fund raising or campaigning or use official legislative or agency accounts for personal benefit.