



# Social Media and Media Relations Policy

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## REVISIONS

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## **1. PURPOSE**

The purpose of this policy is to specify the procedures for dealing with news media and provide guidance on the expected behaviours when using social media and new technologies. This policy applies to Councillors, Council staff, contractors and volunteers and aims to ensure Council's communications with all types of media are timely, professional and accurate.

## **2. SCOPE**

Media is an independent source of information for readers/listeners/viewers, and can be a useful communications tool for Council.

Through the media, Council communicates important information to residents and stakeholders about its services, programs, and activities. Media plays a critical role in facilitating transparency and public trust.

This policy aims to ensure that information is provided to the media in an accurate, timely and professional manner, and to increase the likelihood of useful and balanced information being presented through the organisation's media channels.

The policy outlines requirements for compliance with confidentiality, governance, legal, privacy and regulatory parameters when using social media to conduct Council business. It aims to:

- Inform appropriate use of social media tools;
- Promote effective and productive community engagement through social media;
- Minimise miscommunication or mischievous communications; and
- Help Council manage the challenges of the social media environment

The policy applies to traditional, digital and social media channels where people may comment, create, upload and share content, including:

- Blogs
- Bulletin boards
- Citizen journalism and news sites
- Forums and discussion boards
- Instant messaging facilities
- Microblogging sites (e.g. Twitter)
- Online encyclopedias (e.g. Wikipedia)
- Podcasts
- Social networking sites (e.g. Facebook, LinkedIn)
- Video and photo sharing sites (e.g. Flickr, YouTube)
- Video podcasts
- Wikis
- Any other websites or new technologies that allow people to self-publish.

Given the evolving world of online media, this policy applies to all types of media, whether or not it is named in this policy.

### **3. POLICY PRINCIPLES**

#### **3.1 Contact with news media outlets**

News media enquiries will be addressed and responded to in a timely manner. All enquiries are to be directed to the Communications and Corporate Strategy team who will action the request and coordinate a response. Email [media@egipps.vic.gov.au](mailto:media@egipps.vic.gov.au)

Staff organising or attending events are not permitted to invite the media to attend. Requests are to be submitted to the Communications and Corporate Strategy team who will liaise with media outlets on the officer's behalf. This allows for a coordinated organisational approach.

Any staff member who, in their role as a Council officer, speaks to the media without prior approval is in breach of this policy.

#### **3.2 Authorised media spokespersons**

##### *Mayor*

The Mayor is the only member of Council authorised to respond to media enquiry on all matters relating to Council policy, decisions and direction. This includes state or federal matters affecting local government, and issues impacting the municipality.

The Mayor may authorise another Councillor to respond to media enquiries on a case by case basis.

##### *Chief Executive Officer*

The Chief Executive Officer is the official spokesperson for all operational matters, including Council's administration and the overall organisation. The Chief Executive Officer may authorise another staff member to speak on a particular matter on a case by case basis.

#### **3.3 Communications support**

Council's Communications and Corporate Strategy Unit works to promote Council projects, services, programs and events, amongst others. It supports the communications and marketing aims of Council and all Business Units.

The team's services do not extend to Council's stakeholders, partners or other external organisations.

### **4. SOCIAL MEDIA**

#### **4.1 Official use of social media**

Official use is when you use social media as a council representative.

All requests for new Council social media accounts, pages etc require prior approval, based on the completion of a Social Media Request Form. The form is available on the intranet and EDRMS.

When using social media, staff, contractors and volunteers are expected to:

- Follow Council policies and procedures, as detailed in Section 6.
- Conduct themselves with caution, courtesy, honesty and respect
- Comply with relevant laws and regulations
- Act in a way that is consistent with Council's integrity, reputation and values

Only officers with specific authorisation may respond to issues and requests referring to Council on social media sites, news sites and external channels.

When responding to social media, authorised staff will:

- Respond in a timely manner;
- Treat general Council enquiries in the same manner as other customer requests, following Council's Customer Response Policy; and
- In all cases, the Communications team should be contacted to ensure accurate, consistent and timely communication in accordance with policies.

To become an authorised spokesperson on social media, you need approval from your Director and the Chief Executive Officer via delegation. Requests should be emailed to: [media@egipps.vic.gov.au](mailto:media@egipps.vic.gov.au).

#### **4.2 Guiding principles**

Once authorised to comment as a council representative, you must follow these principles:

- **Expertise and identity**  
Do not comment outside your area of expertise. Council must not be committed to actions or undertakings without specific prior authorisation.  
  
Be clear you are a Council employee/contractor/volunteer. Use your own identity, or an approved official account. Participation anonymously or covertly via a third party or agency is not allowed.
- **Disclosure**  
Only use publicly available information. Do not share 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, Council staff or third parties.
- **Accuracy**  
Be accurate, constructive, helpful and informative. Correct any errors as soon as possible. Do not publish any information that is untrue or where you have a suspicion it may be untrue. This includes misleading or deceptive information.

- **Opinion and political bias**  
Personal and professional opinions must be clearly separated. Follow Council's Codes of Conduct when commenting on Council matters. Do not endorse any politician or political party.
- **Privacy**  
Protect personal information obtained through social media, whether unsolicited or by request.  
  
Respect the privacy of others. Before publication, get permission from anyone who appears in any photographs or video. If someone asks you to remove information directly related to them and could be considered detrimental to their privacy, remove the information as soon as possible.  
  
For more information see the Information Privacy Policy and Information Privacy Guidelines on the Hive. Generic principles for collecting and handling personal information by public bodies are legislated under the *Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014* (Vic), the *Health Records Act 2001* (Vic) and the *Privacy Act 1988* (Cth).
- **Language**  
Language and expression must be professional and reflective of Council's values at all times.
- **Copyright**  
You should respect copyright laws and fair use of copyrighted material and attribute work to the original author/source wherever possible.
- **Defamation**  
Users must not comment, contribute, create, forward, post, upload or share content that is malicious or defamatory. This includes statements that may impact negatively on the reputation of another.
- **Reward**  
Publishing content in exchange for reward of any kind is not allowed.
- **Transparency**  
Users must not seek to buy favourable social media commentary. Online publishers should be encouraged to be open and transparent in how they engage with, or review Council personnel, services or wares.
- **Discrimination**  
Do not publish statements or information that may be discriminatory. Anti-discrimination laws should be kept in mind.
- **State of Mind**  
Avoid using social media when inebriated, irritated, upset or tired.
- **Access**  
Government web standards pertaining to accessibility should be met at all times. Information made available via non-compliant platforms should be made accessible in another form where practical.

*Moderation of Council's social media*

- The site owner must ensure a moderation policy is clear when inviting comments from the public on a council website or social media platform.

### **4.3 Personal use of social media**

When using your personal social media accounts, you should keep this policy in mind.

You must be mindful that the way you represent yourself can be viewed by others and sometimes indirectly or directly connected with council.

Councillors, staff, contractors and volunteers need to maintain the same behaviour standards in their private social media use as is expected at work.

When in doubt, seek guidance from the Communications and Corporate Strategy team on how to comply with the following obligations.

Where your comments or profile can identify you as linked to Council, you must:

- only disclose publicly available information;
- not put down Council, its staff, services etc,
- ensure that all content is accurate;
- clearly state on all postings (identifying you as a Council employee) that the views are your own and are not those of Council; and
- be polite and respectful.

### **4.4 Inappropriate content**

You are not allowed to post or share content that is:

- Offensive, obscene, defamatory, threatening, harassing, bullying, discriminatory, hateful, racist, sexist. This includes swearing.
- Unrelated to the topic of the blog, board, forum or site.
- Implying you are authorised to speak on behalf of Council.
- False or misleading.
- Confidential or personal information about Council, its staff or third parties.
- Under Copyright or Trademark.
- Discriminatory to a person or group. Illegal material or materials designed to encourage law breaking.
- Potentially compromising to the safety of Council, its staff, or systems.
- A breach of applicable laws (privacy, trade practices, financial rules and regulations, fair use).
- Potentially able to bring the Council into disrepute.
- Spam.

#### 4.5 Timeliness of Response

Late responses to media enquiries can cause significant reputational damage. Any staff member required to provide information in order to help the Communications and Corporate Strategy team in responding to a media enquiry must do so within any reasonable timeframe set by the requesting officer.

#### 4.6 After Hours / Emergency Media Response

All after hours media enquiries or emergency communication requirements must be referred to the Manager Corporate Communications and Strategy. If the Manager is unavailable, redirect your enquiry to your Director.

### 5. ENFORCEMENT

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

A Councillor breach of this policy may result in a Councillor Code of Conduct complaint.

Council reserves the right to remove content, where possible, that violates this policy.

Breaches of this policy should be reported to Manager Communications and Corporate Strategy via [media@egipps.vic.gov.au](mailto:media@egipps.vic.gov.au).

### 6. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Role	Responsibilities
Councillors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Seek advice from Communications Department on using social media if required.</li><li>• Understand and follow this policy.</li><li>• Seek social media training if required.</li><li>• Seek advice from the Communications Unit or CEO if unsure about applying the provisions of this policy.</li></ul>
Staff, contractors and volunteers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Refer all requests for media interviews to the Communications Unit.</li><li>• Do not provide comment to a media outlet without prior approval from the CEO, via delegation.</li><li>• Seek authorisation from the Communications Unit on using social media and developing a social media strategy.</li><li>• Seek approval for Council branding of social media.</li><li>• Register social media account/tools/site with the Communications team.</li><li>• Seek social media training and development.</li><li>• Understand and follow this policy.</li><li>• Maintain records of email addresses, comments, 'friends', followers and printed copies or electronic 'screen grabs' when using externally hosted sites to the extent practicable.</li></ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain a record of the team's social media accounts including the intended administrator, URL, login, password, and provide this information to the Communications Unit.</li> <li>• Seek advice from the Communications Unit if unsure about applying the provisions of this policy.</li> <li>• Ensure contractors are provided with a copy of this policy.</li> <li>• Familiarise yourself with the End User Licence Agreements of any external social media tools being used.</li> </ul>
Business Unit Managers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Endorse or reject a social media strategy for any new social media accounts proposed by their teams (Step 1 in approval process).</li> <li>• Ensure staff do not create social media platforms without approval.</li> <li>• Ensure staff members do not conduct media interviews without prior approval from CEO, via delegation.</li> <li>• Ensure contractors are provided with a copy of this policy.</li> </ul>
Information Services Unit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support delivery of council's social media platforms.</li> <li>• Help staff with social media record keeping so they retain some record explaining the context or purpose of social media, and a sample of posts where it is impractical to keep large volumes of screen grabs.</li> </ul>
Communications Unit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Respond to media enquiries and identify spokespeople for interview requests for CEO approval via delegation when required.</li> <li>• Endorse or reject a social media strategy for any new accounts proposed by Business Units (Step 2 in approval process).</li> <li>• Provide authorisation for social media officers (eg staff approved to respond to comments on behalf of council)</li> <li>• Identify and implement any new social media platforms for Council.</li> <li>• Provide advice and assist with the development of communication plans using social media.</li> <li>• Educate councillors, staff, contractors and volunteers about this policy and their responsibilities.</li> <li>• Advise appropriate precautions eg disclaimers.</li> <li>• Maintain a register of council's social media accounts including Business Unit social media strategies, the intended administrator, URL, login, password.</li> <li>• 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.</li> <li>• Monitor and moderate Council's registered social media accounts. This refers to council-wide social media accounts and excludes accounts developed by Business Units.</li> <li>• Monitor social media for references to Council.</li> <li>• Seek legal advice as appropriate where an issue is likely to be contentious or may create legal risk.</li> </ul>

Executive Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Approve or reject a social media strategy for any new accounts proposed by Business Units (Final step in approval process).</li> </ul>
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## 7. REFERENCES AND SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS

Councillors and Council staff are expected to demonstrate standards of conduct and behaviour that are consistent with relevant legislation, regulations and policies (see Annexure A).

The following Council policies and guidelines must be followed:

- Response Assessment Guide (Appendix 1)
- policies for email, internet, digital equipment, electronic communications
- Code of Conduct (Councillor and Staff)
- employment contracts
- Human Resource policies
- Information Services and Communications policies
- Information Privacy Policy
- Community Engagement Policy

## 8. DEFINITIONS AND ABBREVIATIONS

<b>Term</b>	<b>Meaning</b>
Authorised spokesperson	A person with pre-approval to speak to a media outlet on behalf of council.
Social media moderator	Person with pre-approval to add content and respond on behalf of council.
Council	East Gippsland Shire Council.
Confidential	Not public. The private information of a person or group.
EDRMS	Council's electronic records management system
URL	The address of a webpage
Monitor	Watch; keep an eye out for

## 9. ANNEXURE A

### Relevant legislation

- *Australian Human Rights Commission Act 1986* (Cth)
- *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* (Vic)
- *Copyright Act 1968* (Cth)
- *Crimes Act 1958* (Vic)
- *Defamation Act 2005* (Vic)
- *Disability Discrimination Act 1991* (Cth)
- *Equal Opportunity Act 2010* (Vic)
- *Fair Trading Act 1999* (Vic)
- *Fair Work Act 2009* (Cth)
- *Freedom of Information Act 1982* (Vic)
- *Local Government Act 1989* (Vic)
- *Privacy Act 1988* (Cth)
- *Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014*
- *Public Records Act 1973* (Vic)
- *Racial and Religious Tolerance Act 2001* (Vic)
- *Racial Discrimination Act 1985*
- *Spam Act 2003* (Cth)
- *Wrongs Act 1958* (Vic)

# Response assessment chart for social media moderators

This table will help you decide whether you need to respond to a post on council's social media platforms.

Only approved social media moderators are allowed to respond on behalf of the organisation to social media posts.

Appropriate	Inaccurate	Low risk	High risk
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You can:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agree with the post</li> <li>• Provide additional information to expand on the original post</li> <li>• Provide a positive review / appreciation</li> <li>• Not respond (let the post stand on its own two feet)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Post contains inaccurate information about:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Council services, programs, or activities</li> <li>• A local law or regulation</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Post contains:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Offensive language</li> <li>• Inappropriate comments</li> <li>• Inflammatory statements</li> <li>• Criticism of staff or Councillors</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Post contains:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Threats against staff, Councillors or our facilities</li> <li>• Defamatory comments</li> <li>• High-level offensive language</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Actions	Actions	Actions	Actions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Respond to post</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contact relevant business unit or Communications to confirm correct information; then</li> <li>• Respond to post</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make a record of the post</li> <li>• Delete the post</li> <li>• Advise author why their comment was deleted (if appropriate)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make a record of the post</li> <li>• Delete the post</li> <li>• Flag the post</li> <li>• Contact Communications and Risk Management business units</li> </ul>