

Department Use of Social Media

342.1 PURPOSE AND SCOPE

This policy provides guidelines to ensure that any use of social media on behalf of or representing the Department is consistent with the Department's mission and applicable law.

This policy does not address all aspects of social media use. Additional policies that interrelate with this policy include:

- Personal use of social media by department members (see the Employee Speech, Expression and Social Networking Policy--1028).
- Use of social media in personnel processes (see the Recruitment and Selection Policy--1000).
- Use of social media as part of a criminal investigation, other than disseminating information to the public on behalf of the Department (see the Investigation and Prosecution Policy--600).
- Use of social media with the media (See the Media Relations Policy--343).

342.1.1 DEFINITIONS

Definitions related to this policy include:

Social media - Any of a wide array of internet-based tools and platforms that allow for the sharing of information, such as the Department website or social networking services.

342.2 POLICY

The Fargo Police Department is committed to utilizing social media as a valuable means of assisting the Department and its personnel in expanding community outreach, increasing transparency and trust, enhancing investigative outcomes, crime prevention, and related objectives. This policy provides guidance on the use of social media by department personnel acting in their official capacity.

Department members shall ensure that the use or access of social media is done in a manner that protects the constitutional rights of all.

342.3 DEPARTMENT SITES

The creation of all department social media sites or pages shall be approved by the Chief of Police or designee. Division commanders may authorize use of approved sites as appropriate to official duties and needs of the division. Except for sites properly approved and utilized to gather intelligence, conduct criminal investigations, etc. all social media sites or pages shall be administered by the Department's Community Engagement Strategist (CES) with oversight of the Chief or designee. All social media sites or pages shall indicate that they are maintained by the Department and should have contact information for the Department prominently displayed. All official social media sites shall be branded with a Fargo Police Department and City of Fargo logo.

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Each social media page or site should include an introductory statement, which clearly states the purpose and scope of the agency's presence on the website. The page should also link to the Department's official website and be designed with a target audience in mind (i.e. youth, potential police recruits).

Social media content shall adhere to applicable laws, regulations, and policies, including all information technology and records management policies. Information contained on these sites is subject to open records law and relevant records retention schedules. All content must be managed, stored, and retrieved to comply with applicable laws and policies.

Social media sites should state that the opinions expressed by visitors to the pages do not reflect the views or opinions of the Department. Pages should clearly indicate that posted comments may not be regularly monitored and emergency communications should be made via the Red River Regional Dispatch Center. The Department may only remove content that is legally permissible to remove, such as obscenities. Pages shall also indicate that any content posted or submitted for posting is subject to public disclosure.

342.4 AUTHORIZED USERS

The Department's Community Engagement Specialist (CES) is responsible for managing, posting, monitoring, and engaging across the Department's various social media platforms. The CES also produces internal and external videography content and contributes to the development of annual reports and other presentations as requested. The CES works in concert with division commanders and the PIO to ensure work product is reviewed and appropriate for release, while maintaining continuity in both internal messaging and external communications with the public.

All social media accounts shall be created as a department or department-approved independent account. Accounts shall not be created within, or in relation to, a member's personal account or information. Only members authorized by the Chief of Police or otherwise authorized by department policy may utilize social media on behalf of the Department. Authorized members should use only department-approved equipment to post and monitor department-related social media.

The Chief of Police or designee, in concert with the CES, may develop specific guidelines identifying the type of content that may be posted.

Requests to post information over department social media by members who are not authorized to post should be made through the member's chain of command.

342.5 AUTHORIZED CONTENT

Only content that is appropriate for public release, supports the Department mission, conforms to all department policies regarding the release of information, and is properly reviewed based on the content and intention of the release may be posted. The CES and/or PIO shall work collaboratively with division, shift, and unit commanders to ensure there is appropriate review and approval of social media content prior to posting.

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Examples of appropriate content include:

- (a) Public announcements regarding a safety concern, missing person, etc.
- (b) Tips and information related to crime prevention, special events, etc..
- (c) Investigative requests for information, to include identifying suspects and/or persons of interest.
- (d) Requests that ask the community to engage in projects that are relevant to the Department mission.
- (e) Real-time safety information that is related to in-progress crimes, geographical warnings, or disaster information.
- (f) Traffic-related information.
- (g) Media releases.
- (h) Personnel recruitment or hiring events.
- (i) Postings highlighting the good work of department members.

In cases requiring immediate distribution of a social media release, such as response to a critical incident, public safety notice, etc., in which delay may inhibit police operations, a shift or division commander may authorize the distribution of a social media release. The release should follow the approved template format and be reviewed by a second member prior to distribution.

Authorized members shall review all content prior to posting to ensure that the posting does not contain prohibited content.

342.6 PROHIBITED CONTENT

Content that is prohibited from posting includes, but is not limited to:

- (a) Content that is abusive, discriminatory, inflammatory or sexually explicit.
- (b) Any information that violates individual rights, including confidentiality and/or privacy rights and those provided under state, federal or local laws.
- (c) Any information that could compromise an ongoing investigation.
- (d) Any information that could tend to compromise or damage the mission, function, reputation or professionalism of the Department or its members.
- (e) Any information that could compromise the safety and security of department operations, members of the Department or the public.
- (f) Any content posted for personal use.
- (g) Any content that has not been properly authorized by this policy.

Any member who becomes aware of content on any of the Department's social media sites that they believe is unauthorized or inappropriate should promptly report such content to a supervisor. The supervisor should consult with the CES and if legally allowable, ensure its removal from public

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view and/or investigate the cause of the entry if posted without authorization by a department member.

342.6.1 PUBLIC POSTING

Department social media sites shall be designed and maintained in order to provide posting of content by the public. The Department reserves the right to restrict or remove any publicly posted content which is deemed in violation of any applicable law or regulation related to publicly posted material.

342.7 MONITORING CONTENT

The Chief and the CES shall annually review the use of department social media and evaluate the resources being used, the effectiveness of the content, any unauthorized or inappropriate content, and the resolution of any issues. The CES should review department social media on a regular basis for any posted prohibited content and remove it upon discovery.

342.8 RETENTION OF RECORDS

The Professional Standards Division commander should work with the CES and department custodian of records to establish a method of ensuring that public records generated in the process of social media use are retained in accordance with established records retention schedules.

342.9 TRAINING

Authorized members should receive training that, at a minimum, addresses legal issues concerning the appropriate use of social media sites, as well as privacy, civil rights, dissemination and retention of information posted on department sites.

342.10 REVISION DATE 01/20/2026