



Ararat Rural City

Social Media Policy

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Chief Executive Officer

Governance and Risk Lead Media and Communications Leads

Media Team

1 INTENT

Ararat Rural City Council (Council) recognises that social media provides opportunities for dynamic and interactive two-way communications with the community which can complement existing communication and further improve information, access and delivery of key services.

Council also recognises the value of social media in supporting the Organisational Vision.

The intent of this policy is to outline the appropriate use of social media platforms and tools by Councillors, Council staff, volunteers, contractors and for the purpose of conducting Council business.

2 POLICY

This policy applies to all Councillors, Council staff, volunteers and contractors who purport to use social media on behalf of Council. This policy will also apply to agencies and individuals who provide services to Council and will be included in all relevant external supplier contracts. 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 for Council;
- Promote effective and productive community engagement through social media;
- Minimise miscommunication or mischievous communications;
- Help Council manage the inherent challenges of speed and immediacy.

The policy applies to those digital spaces where people may comment, contribute, create, forward, post, upload and share content, including but not limited to:

- Social networking sites (e.g. Facebook, X/Twitter, Instagram, SnapChat, MySpace, Google+, Bebo, Friendster, LinkedIn, TikTok, Reddit, BeReal, RedNote);
- Video and photo sharing sites (e.g. Flickr, YouTube, Pinterest);blogs;
- Bulletin boards;
- Citizen journalism and news sites which facilitate public comment;
- Forums and discussion boards;
- Instant messaging facilities; (e.g. WhatsApp, Telegram, Facebook Messenger, WeChat, Discord)
- Online encyclopaedias (e.g. Wikipedia);
- Podcasts;
- Video podcasts;
- Wikis;
- Any other websites that allow individuals to use simple publishing tools or new technologies emerging from the digital environment.

As it is not possible to expressly refer to or list the specific sites or kinds of social media outlets either extant or emerging, the absence of a reference to a particular site or kind of social media activity **does not limit the application of this policy**.

This policy is not intended to cover personal use of social media where:

- the author publishes information in their personal capacity and not on behalf of, or in association with Council; and
- no reference is made to Council, its Councillors, Council staff, policies and services, suppliers or other stakeholders or Council related issues.

Personal use of social media during work hours is prohibited unless authorised by a manager.

2.1 Legislative and policy framework

Councillors and Council staff, volunteers and contractors are expected to demonstrate standards of conduct and behaviour that are consistent with relevant legislation, regulations and policies.

Council policies and guideline provisions which must be adhered to in relation to the use of social media include the following:

- Councillor Code of Conduct;
- Staff Code of Conduct;
- Employment contracts;
- Information Technology Policy
- Information Technology Usage Policy and Procedure;
- Media and Communications Procedure; and
- Privacy Policy.

When using social media in relation to Council matters on either a private account or a Council page, Councillors, Council staff, volunteers and Contractors are expected to:

- Adhere to Council codes of conduct, policies and procedures;
- Behave with caution, courtesy, honesty and respect;
- Comply with relevant laws and regulations;
- Reinforce the integrity, reputation and values of Council.

The following content is not permitted under any circumstances by Councillors, Council staff, volunteers and contractors:

- Abusive, profane or sexual language;
- Content which is false or misleading;
- Confidential information about Council or third parties;
- Copyright or trademark protected materials;
- 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;
- Illegal material or materials designed to encourage law breaking;
- Sexually explicit letters, emails or SMS messages;
- Materials that could compromise Council, Council staff, volunteers or system safety;
- Materials which would breach applicable laws (defamation, privacy, trade practices, financial rules and regulations, fair use, trademarks);
- Material which would bring Council into disrepute;
- Personal details or references to Councillors, Council staff or third parties, which may be inconsistent with Council's Privacy Policy;
- Spam, meaning the distribution of unsolicited bulk electronic messages;
- Statements which may be considered bullying or harassment.

Council's Media Team, when posting on social media, will do so in collaboration with the relevant department.

Council staff who are authorised administrators of Council social media sites are discouraged from updating their personal blogs and social media sites while using council-owned technology including computers, mobile phones and tablets.

Councillors, Council staff, volunteers and contractors must not say or do anything to potentially damage the operations or reputation of Council whilst using their personal social media accounts during either working or non-working periods. Accordingly, they must be sensitive to separate their personal opinions from professional ones.

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Councillors, Council staff, volunteers and contractors should exercise caution when referring to Council matters on a personal, or a third party, social media site. If the content discusses work or work-related topics, employees should avoid:

- Disclosing confidential documents or details;
- Discussing internal discussions or decisions; and
- Publishing content in exchange for reward of any kind.

Council staff found to be discussing this information will be subject to the conditions as outlined within Council's Performance Management Disciplinary Policy and Procedure.

If you have any doubt about applying the provisions of this policy, seek clarification from a member of the Media Team before using social media to communicate. Depending upon the nature of the issue and potential risk, it may also be appropriate to consider seeking legal advice.

2.2 Consequences of Policy Breach

Council's Media Team reserves the right to ban any user and remove content from its social media sites, if this policy or any associated policies have been violated.

For Council staff, volunteers and contractors, breaching this policy may result in a code of conduct complaint, performance management and/or review. Serious breaches may result in suspension or termination of employment or association.

For Councillors, breaching this policy may result in a Code of Conduct complaint.

2.3 Roles and Responsibilities for using Social Media

Role	Responsibilities
Mayor/CEO	<p>The Mayor will provide official comment to the media on behalf of Council where the matter is of a political, controversial or sensitive nature. This includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• State-wide political issues affecting Local Government;• Contentious local issues that impact the community that do not relate directly to the business of Council but to the representation of the community;• Issues pertaining to policy and Council decisions;• Issues relating to the strategic direction of Council; and• The Mayor may nominate another Councillor or the Chief Executive Officer to make official comment on behalf of Council, where appropriate. <p>The Chief Executive Officer is the official spokesperson for all operational matters pertaining to Council as an organisation</p>
Councillors	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Seek advice and authorisation from the Chief Executive Officer on using social media.• Seek approval for Council branding of social media.• Register social media account/tools/site with Council's Media Team.• Understand and comply with the provisions in this policy.• Seek training and development for using social media.• Seek advice from Council's Media Team if unsure about applying the provisions of this policy.• Individual Councillors are entitled to express independent views through the media, however they must make clear that any unofficial comment is a personal view and does not necessarily represent the position of Council as a whole.• No Council staff will assist with the implementation or management of personal social media sites of or for Councillors.

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<p>Council staff, volunteers and contractors</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seek approval from relevant manager for business strategy incorporating social media. • Seek advice and authorisation from Council's Media Team, Chief Executive Officer on using social media on behalf of Council and when developing a communications plan to support business strategy. • Seek approval for Council branding of social media from either Council's Media Team or the Chief Executive Officer. • Seek training and development for using social media. • Understand and comply with the provisions in this policy. • Maintain records of email addresses, comments, 'friends', followers and printed copies or electronic 'screen grabs' when using externally hosted sites to the extent practicable. • Seek advice from the Media Team or the Chief Executive Officer if unsure about applying the provisions of this policy. • Ensure contractors are provided with a copy of this policy. • Familiarise with the End User Licence Agreements of any external social media tools being used.
<p>Managers</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approve business strategy incorporating use of social media. • If establishing a new Council-run page, ensure staff consult and obtain authorisation from the Chief Executive Officer or Council's Media Team on their planned use of social media. • Ensure contractors are provided with a copy of the Social Media Policy. • Ensure training for staff using social media is completed prior to the site going live. • Advise Information Technology (IT) of approval to access social media for business purposes.
<p>Information Technology Department</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitate secure access to support delivery of Council business via social media. • Regularly back up and archive internally hosted social media sites. • 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.
<p>Media Team</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Authorise use of social media tools for conducting Council business. • Provide advice and assist with the development of communication plans using social media. • Educate Councillors, Council staff, volunteers and contractors about this policy and their responsibilities when using social media. • Provide social media training when requested. • Advise appropriate precautions e.g. disclaimers. • Monitor social media accounts/tools/sites registered for conducting Council business. • Monitor social media for references to Council. • Seek legal advice as appropriate in circumstances where an issue is likely to be contentious or may create legal risk for Council. • Ensure the Social Media Policy is being followed accordingly by Councillors, Council staff, volunteers and contractors to the best of abilities and resources available. • If the Social Media Policy is breached, advise the CEO for relevant disciplinary action.

2.4 Requirements for use of social media by Councillors, Council staff, volunteers and contractors

2.4.1 Authorisation to create a new Council page, site or account

In the case of a new social media account created on behalf of Council by a Councillor, appropriate written authorisation should be obtained from the CEO. In the case of a new social media account created on behalf of Council by a staff member, volunteer or contractor, written authorisation should be obtained from the Media Team... Approval will not be given for the new social media account until appropriate discussions have been undertaken by the relevant officer(s) of the account with Council's Media Team. Once approved, this process will be facilitated by Council's Media Team, but ownership of the account remains with the relevant officer(s). The role of Council's Media Team includes working with the relevant officer(s) to upload content and monitor tone of communication.

2.4.2 Administration of Accounts

Council's Media Team must have administration rights of all social media accounts that are Council managed. This is to allow adequate monitoring, ensuring consistent tone and content, and banning or blocking where required.

2.4.3 Requests from the Media

No Councillor, Council staff, volunteer or contractor is to issue a statement or make an announcement regarding Council matters or on behalf of Council through social media channels unless authorised. If approached through social media for comment, refer the enquiry to the Media Team as per Council's Media and Communications Procedure.

2.4.4 Expertise

When posting to social media, a staff members are not to comment outside their area of expertise or commit Council to actions/undertakings. Posts must reflect only the area of Council activity for which the social media account has been set up. Council staff should not comment or react to "out of scope" posts.

2.4.5 Disclosure

When using social media in any capacity, Councillors, Council staff, volunteers and contractors should only discuss information pertaining to Council which is publicly available. Do not disclose confidential information, internal discussions or decisions of Council, Council staff, volunteers or third parties. This includes publishing confidential, personal or private information where there is sufficient detail for potential identification of Councillors, Council staff, volunteers or third parties.

2.4.6 Accuracy

All Councillors, Council staff, volunteers and contractors are encouraged to be accurate, constructive, helpful and informative in their social media activities. Any errors should be corrected as soon as practicable. Councillors, Council staff, volunteers or contractors must not publish information or make statements which are known to be false or may reasonably be taken to be misleading or deceptive.

2.4.7 Identity

Councillors, Council staff, volunteers and contractors should be clear about professional identity, and/or any vested interests while using social media. Do not use fictitious names or identities that deliberately deceive or mislead, nor participate anonymously or covertly via a third party or agency. These activities constitute gross misconduct under Council's Performance Management Employee Discipline Policy, and will be dealt with accordingly.

2.4.8 Opinion

Council staff should not express or publish a personal opinion on Council generally, nor about Council business, via social media.

Councillors should be mindful of the Councillor Code of Conduct when discussing or commenting on Council matters. Generally, Councillors should not express personal opinions on Council decisions or Council business nor be critical of Council. If it is not possible to separate official Council positions from personal opinions, Councillors should consider using a formal disclaimer to separate interests.

2.4.9 Direct Family Members of Councillors, Council staff, volunteers and Contractors

Direct family members of Councillors, Council staff, volunteers and contractors should avoid expressing personal opinions towards Council or Council business on social media, due to association.

2.4.10 Privacy

All Councillors, Council staff, volunteers and contractors should be sensitive to the privacy of others. Permission must be secured from any person who appears in photographs, video or other media formats before sharing the material via social media. If asked to remove materials, social media administrators should do so as soon as practicable.

Any material relating to social media – including comments, email, followers, friends, posts and subscriber lists – is considered public records if the communication is created or received as part of the staff member's duties as a Council staff member, and will therefore be subject to Council's Privacy Statement. Refer to Council's Privacy Policy for more information.

2.4.11 Intellectual Property

Permission from the creator or copyright owner should be sought to use or reproduce copyright material including applications, sound recordings (speeches, songs), footage (video), graphics (graphs, charts and logos), images, artwork, photographs, publications or music. Councillors, Council staff, volunteers and contractors should also seek permission before publishing or uploading material in which intellectual property rights, such as trademarks, are owned by a third party e.g. company logos. Permission from the website's owner should also be given wherever possible before linking to another site (including a social media application).

2.4.12 Defamation

Councillors, Council staff, volunteers and contractors are not to comment, contribute, create, forward, post, upload or share content that is malicious or defamatory. This includes statements which may negatively impact the reputation of Council as an organisation.

2.4.13 Reward

Councillors, Council staff, volunteers and contractors will not publish content in exchange for reward of any kind.

2.4.14 Transparency

Councillors, Council staff, volunteers and contractors will not seek to buy or recompense favourable social media commentary. They will encourage online publishers to be open and transparent in how they engage with or review Council personnel, services or wares.

2.4.15 Political Bias

Councillors, Council staff, volunteers and contractors will not endorse any political affinity or allegiance via social media.

2.4.16 Respect

Councillors, Council staff, volunteers and contractors should always be courteous, patient and respectful of others' opinions via social media, including detractors.

2.4.17 Discrimination

Councillors, Council staff, volunteers and contractors should be mindful of anti-discrimination laws and must not publish statements or information via social media which may be discriminatory.

2.4.18 Prevention of Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment can occur through electronic means (such as emails or text messages or by viewing pornographic websites) and through social media, regardless of whether or not the material was transmitted or accessed during work hours. Where there is a link to Council, all Councillors, Council staff, volunteers and contractors are subject to the same rules about sexual harassment in the virtual world as they are in the real world. As such, they are required to use technology and social media responsibly.

2.4.19 Language

Councillors, Council staff, volunteers and contractors should be mindful of language and expression while using social media.

2.4.20 State of Mind

Councillors, Council staff, volunteers and contractors should not use social media when inebriated, irritated, upset or tired.

2.4.21 Be Safe

Councillors, Council staff, volunteers and contractors should implement safe practices to protect personal privacy and to guard against identity theft or scams.

2.4.22 Modification and Moderation

Councillors, Council staff, volunteers and contractors should ensure that any social media sites created or contributed to can be readily edited, improved or removed and appropriately moderated.

2.4.23 Be Responsive

Councillors, Council staff, volunteers, and contractors are only to engage with social media commentary where appropriate and in a timely manner. Council's phone number, email address, Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn accounts should be made readily available to facilitate communication between the community and Council.

Monitoring of Council social media is the responsibility of Council's Media Team or the page/site's approved administrator(s). Appropriate actions of response shall be taken to the best of the administrator's abilities and resources including outside of office hours.

Council reserves the right, for legal compliance purposes, to monitor social media usage on its systems without advance notice and consistent with any applicable state, federal or international laws.

Council may be legally required to produce logs, diaries and archives of social media use to judicial, law enforcement and regulatory agencies and will comply with any relevant requests.

2.4.24 Enforcement of policy

All content published or communicated by or on behalf of Council using social media must be recorded.

Council actively monitors social media for relevant contributions that impact on Council, its operations and reputation. Council will be able to find – and act upon – contributions made by Councillors and Council staff if deemed necessary.

This policy will be published and promoted to Councillors, Council staff, volunteers and contractors of Council.

3 ADMINISTRATIVE UPDATES

It is recognised that, from time to time, the need for minor administrative changes to this document may arise. Where an update does not materially alter this document, such a change may be made administratively. Examples include a change to the name of a Council department, a change to the name of a Federal or State department, and a minor update to legislation which does not have a material impact. However, any change or update which materially alters this document must be by resolution of Council.

4 REFERENCES

Councillor Code of Conduct
Privacy Policy
Staff Code of Conduct
Community Engagement Policy
Election Period Policy
Workplace Anti-Discrimination and Harassment Policy
Information Technology Policy
Information Technology Usage Procedure
Performance Management Discipline Policy
Media and Communications procedure
Social Media Procedure
Performance Management Discipline procedure
Council Prevention of Sexual Harassment Policy
Prevention of Sexual Harassment in the Workplace Policy
Internal Media request procedure and templates
Individual employment contracts

Below is a list of legislation and areas that are relevant in the context of social media for Council.

- Australian Human Rights Commission Act 1986 (Cth)
- Age Discrimination Act 2004 (Cth)
- Copyright Act 1968
- Crimes Act 1958
- Defamation Act 2005
- Employment contracts

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- Equal Opportunity Act 2010
- Fair Work Act 2009 (Commonwealth) – Human Resources policies
- Freedom of Information Act 1982
- Local Government Act 1989
- Local Government Act 2020
- Victorian Equal Opportunity Act 2010 (or Australian Human Rights Commission Act 1986)
- Spam Act 2003 (Cth)
- Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014
- Public Records Act 1973
- Sex Discrimination Act 1984 (Cth)
- Wrongs Act 1958

5 APPENDICES

Nil.