

POLICY 129.1	SOCIAL MEDIA	
	NEW: 07/11, 08/16	RELATED POLICIES: 106.0, 129.0
	CFA STANDARDS:	REVIEWED: As Needed

A. PURPOSE

This policy establishes the Department’s position on the utility and management of social media and provides guidance on its management, administration, and oversight. This policy is not meant to address one particular form of social media, rather social media in general, as advances in technology will occur and new tools will emerge.

The Fort Lauderdale Police Department has a duty to protect the reputation and integrity of the Department and its members, as well as guard against liability and potential legal risk. Therefore, the Department reserves the right to monitor social media.

B. POLICY

The Department recognizes the role that social media plays in the personal lives of some Department personnel; however, the personal use of social media can have bearing on Departmental personnel in their official capacity. As such, this policy provides information of a precautionary nature as well as prohibitions on the use of social media by Department personnel.

C. DEFINITIONS

Blog: A self-published diary or commentary on a particular topic that may allow visitors to post responses, reactions, or comments. The term is short for “Web log.”

Page: The specific portion of a social media website where content is displayed, and managed by an individual or individuals with administrator rights.

Post: Content an individual shares on a social media site or the act of publishing content on a site.

Profile: Information that a user provides about himself/herself on a social networking site.

Social Media: A category of Internet-based resources that integrate user-generated content and user participation. This includes, but is not limited to, social networking sites (Facebook, MySpace), microblogging sites (Twitter, Nixle), photo and video-sharing sites (Flickr, YouTube), wikis (Wikipedia), blogs, and news sites (Digg, Reddit).

Social Networks: Online platforms where users can create profiles, share information, and socialize with others using a range of technologies.

Speech: Expression or communication of thoughts or opinions in spoken words, in writing, by expressive conduct, symbolism, photographs, video, or related forms of communication.

Wiki: Web page(s) that can be edited collaboratively.

D. ON-THE-JOB USE

This policy is not intended to prevent Department personnel from accessing social media for legitimate, work related purposes.

1. Potential Uses

- a. Social media can be a valuable investigative tool when seeking evidence or information.
- b. Search methods shall not involve techniques that are a violation of existing law.
- c. This Department has an obligation to include Internet-based content when conducting back-ground investigations of job candidates.
- d. Every effort must be made to validate Internet-based information considered during the hiring process.
- e. Use of social media is a valuable tool for recruitment efforts.

2. Employees will not utilize any City issued equipment to access personal social media sites, blogs, websites, or public forums while on duty, or while working off-duty details unless required in the performance of their duties.

E. PERSONAL USE

While Department personnel have the right to use personal/social networking pages or sites, as employees of the Department, they are public servants who are held to a higher standard than the general public with regard to standards of conduct and ethics.

Department personnel are free to express themselves as private citizens on social media sites to the degree that their speech does not impair working relationships of this Department for which loyalty and confidentiality are important, impede the performance of duties, impair discipline and harmony among co-workers, or negatively affect the public perception of the Department.

As public employees, Department personnel are cautioned that speech on or off-duty, made pursuant to their official duties – that is, that owes its existence to the employee's professional duties and responsibilities – may not be protected speech under the First Amendment and may form the basis for discipline, if deemed detrimental to the Department. Department personnel should assume that their speech and related activity on social media sites may reflect upon the Department.

1. Prohibitions

Barring state law or binding employment contracts to the contrary, Department personnel shall abide by the following when using social media:

- a. Department personnel shall not post, transmit, or otherwise disseminate any information to which they have access to as a result of their employment, or could reasonably be considered to represent the views or positions of this Department without permission from the Chief of Police or his/her designee.
- b. Department personnel shall not display Department or city logos, seals, badges, patches, uniforms, or similar identifying items on any social media format, as these items are protected official images and symbols of the City of Fort Lauderdale. Posting of photographs to celebrate or commemorate personal accomplishments or achievements within the Department, such as promotions and awards or other ceremonies, must be in compliance with this policy and only reflect positively upon the Department.
- c. When using social media, Department personnel should be mindful that their speech becomes part of the worldwide electronic domain. Therefore, adherence to the Department's Rules of Conduct is required in the personal use of social media. In particular, Department personnel are prohibited from the following:
 - (1). Speech containing obscene or sexually explicit language, images, or acts and statements or other forms of speech that ridicule, malign, disparage, or otherwise express bias against any race, any religion, or any protected class of individuals.
 - (2). Speech involving themselves or other Department personnel reflecting behavior that would reasonably be considered reckless or irresponsible.
- d. Engaging in speech that may provide grounds for undermining or impeaching an officer's testimony in criminal proceedings.

2. Precautions

- a. For safety and security reasons, it is suggested that Department personnel not disclose their employment with this Department on any social media site nor shall they post information pertaining to any other member of the Department without their permission.
- b. Department personnel should be aware that they may be subject to civil litigation for;
 - (1). publishing or posting false information that harms the reputation of another person, group, or organization;
 - (2). publishing or posting private facts and personal information about someone without their permission that has not been previously

revealed to the public, is not of legitimate public concern, and would be offensive to a reasonable person;

- (3). using someone else's name, likeness, or other personal attributes without that person's permission for an exploitative purpose; or
 - (4). publishing the creative work of another, trademarks, or certain confidential business information without the permission of the owner.
- c. Department personnel should be aware that privacy settings and social media sites are constantly in flux, and they should never assume that personal information posted on such sites is protected.
 - d. Department personnel should expect that any information created, transmitted, downloaded, exchanged, or discussed in a public online forum may be accessed by the Department at any time without prior notice.
 - e. Any member who becomes aware of or having knowledge of a posting, website or web page in violation of this policy shall notify his/her supervisor.