

## **SUBJECT: VA Employee Social Media Policy**

### **1. Purpose.**

This Order establishes policy for employee use of social media.

### **2. Applicability.**

This Order applies to all VA employees. It also applies to contractors engaged in social media on behalf of VA as part of their duties.

### **3. Background.**

VA encourages the use of social media technologies to enhance communication, collaboration, and information exchange in support of VA's mission. By openly sharing knowledge, best practices, and lessons learned within the agency, with and from other federal, state, and local partners, and with and from the public, we can provide more effective solutions and efficiencies to enhance excellence in the business of government.

As the technology evolves, this order will evolve, but in general terms, this order defines guiding principles for use of these technologies by VA employees. The use of social media technology follows the same standards of professional practice and conduct associated with everything else we do. Common sense and sound judgment help avoid the most vexing issues.

### **4. Definitions.**

"Social media" and "Web 2.0" are umbrella terms that encompass the various activities that integrate technology, social interaction, and content creation. Social media use many technologies and forms, such as blogs, wikis, photo and video sharing, podcasts, social networking, mashups, and virtual worlds.

### **5. Guiding Principles.**

a. Know and follow VA and Executive Branch conduct guidelines, such as *Standards of Ethical Conduct for Employees of the Executive Branch*.

These standards cover topics of prohibited activities such as:

- Engaging in vulgar or abusive language, personal attacks of any kind, or
- offensive terms targeting individuals or groups.
- Endorsement of commercial products, services, or entities.
- Endorsement of political parties, candidates, or groups.
- Lobbying members of Congress using GSA or any other appropriated
- resource.

b. Published content is persistent in the public domain. When you are representing VA in an official capacity, VA is responsible for the content you publish on blogs,

wikis or any other form of user-generated media. Assume your communications are in the public domain, available for publishing or discussion in all forms of media.

c. When you discuss VA or VA-related matters, you may need to coordinate your writing with the Office of [REDACTED] and the Office of General Counsel (OGC). When in doubt, consult [REDACTED] and/or OGC.

d. If you publish content to any website outside of VA's official online presence (this may include VA websites as well as VA's official presence on third party sites) and it has something to do with subjects associated with VA, consider a disclaimer such as this: "The postings are my own and do not necessarily represent VA's positions, strategies or opinions." Never use or reference your formal position when writing in a non-official capacity. Consult [REDACTED] and/or OGC when in doubt.

e. Those with leadership responsibilities, by virtue of their position, must consider whether personal thoughts they publish, even in clearly personal venues, may be misunderstood as expressing VA positions. They should assume that their team and those outside VA will read what is written. A public blog is not the place to communicate VA policies to VA employees. Assume your thoughts are in the public domain and can be published or discussed in all forms of media. Have no expectation of privacy.

f. Respect copyright, fair use and financial disclosure laws. Always protect sensitive information, such as protected acquisition and personally identifiable information. Do not publish or report on conversations that are meant to be pre-decisional or internal to VA unless given permission by management.

g. Be aware of your VA association in online social networks. If you identify yourself as a VA employee or have a public facing position for which your GSA association is known to the general public, ensure your profile and related content (even if it is of a personal and not an official nature) is consistent with how you wish to present yourself as a VA professional, appropriate with the public trust associated with your position, and conforms to existing standards, such as *Standards of Ethical Conduct for Employees of the Executive Branch*. Have no expectation of privacy.

h. Remain focused on customers, existing commitments, and achieving VA's mission. Your use of social media tools should never interfere with your primary duties, with the exception of where it is a primary duty to use these tools to do your job. Existing policies covering employee behavior on acceptable personal usage can be found in [REDACTED].

i. Ensure use complies with applicable mandates, such as Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, IT Security Policy, and the Federal Records Act.

**6. Labor management relations responsibilities.**

Implementation of this order with respect to employees represented by a labor organization is contingent upon completion of appropriate labor relations obligations.

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**References:**

*Tyrone –What would be applicable for VA?*

ADM 7800.11A Personal Use of Agency Office Equipment  
HCO IL-08-1 GSA Rules of Behavior for Handling Personally Identifiable Information (PII)  
CPO\*\* 9751.1 Maintaining Discipline  
CSC 2140.1 Management of GSA's Total Web Presence  
CIO 2105.1 Managing Electronic and Information Technology for People with Disabilities  
CIO P 1820.1, GSA Records Maintenance and Disposition System