

GENERAL ORDER



DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

Title		
Social Media		
Topic	Series	Number
SPT	302	03
Effective Date		
July 13, 2022		
Related to		
GO-PER-201.26 (Duties, Responsibilities, and Conduct of Members of the Department)		
Rescinds		
Part IV.E. of GO-SPT-302.08 [Metropolitan Police Department Wide Area Network (MPDNet)], Effective Date November 27, 2013		

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I. PURPOSE

It is the policy of the Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) to use social media in a thoughtful, focused manner to further the department's community outreach and crime prevention goals. MPD endorses the secure use of social media to enhance communication, collaboration, and information exchange; streamline processes; and foster productivity. As advances in technology are constantly emerging, this general order is intended to address social media in general, rather than any singular form of social media. The purpose of this general order is to establish the department's position on the utility and management of social media and provide guidance on its management, administration, and oversight. This general order also sets forth expectations of department members with respect to their use of social media and the direct effect such use has upon the reputation, perception, and interests of the department. This general order does not address the department's use of social media for investigative and intelligence-gathering efforts.

II. PROCEDURES

A. General

1. Social media provides a contemporary and potentially valuable means of assisting the department and its personnel in meeting several police strategies, including, but not limited to, community outreach, problem-solving, and crime prevention. Social media also plays a significant role in the personal lives of numerous sworn and civilian department members. However, it must be formally and universally recognized that the personal use of social media has the potential to impact the department as a whole, as well as individual members serving 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.

2. As law enforcement personnel, members' on- and off-duty conduct is subject to additional scrutiny. When using social media, members must exercise good judgment and refrain from engaging in conduct that undermines their credibility as MPD members. All existing laws, rules, regulations, and directives that govern on- and off-duty conduct are applicable to conduct associated with the personal use of social media. **Members shall ensure that their online conduct is consistent with GO-PER-201.26 (Duties, Responsibilities, and Conduct of Members of the Department) and this general order, including, but not limited to, refraining from conduct that brings discredit upon themselves, MPD, or the department.** Violations of department policies, including but not limited to [GO-PER-201.26](#), will result in an administrative investigation that, if sustained, may result in discipline.
3. MPD recognizes and respects the First Amendment rights of members and community members to participate on social media platforms. Notwithstanding any other provision of this policy, a member shall not be prohibited from exercising his or her First Amendment rights, reporting violations or concerns under the District Whistleblower Protection Act ([DC Official Code § 1-615.51](#) *et seq.*) or the Board of Ethics and Government Accountability Establishment and Comprehensive Ethics Reform Amendment Act of 2011 ([DC Official Code § 1-1161.01](#) *et seq.*), or making any other legally protected disclosure.
4. When using social media, members shall be mindful that their speech becomes part of the worldwide electronic domain. Even if a member has created "private" or "limited access" accounts or has customized privacy settings, any statements, photographs, video clips, or information sent over the internet may still be viewed and disseminated by third parties, even after the content has been edited or deleted by the user. The content of social media websites may be obtained for use in criminal trials, civil proceedings, and department investigations.
5. Members shall not use their status as MPD members to endorse any product or service without prior written permission from the chief of police or his or her designee.
6. MPD recognizes two general categories of social media use among members.
 - a. Personal use is the engagement or participation in any personal social media platforms, including but not limited to, personally-owned sites, sites of others, news media pages, professional sites unaffiliated with MPD, or other online information exchange forums.
 - b. Department-authorized use is the engagement or participation in social media platforms for the specific purpose of assisting the department and its members in community outreach, problem-solving, crime prevention, and other department-related objectives.

B. Personal Use of Social Media

1. Unless previously released by the department, or otherwise public or already in the public domain, members shall not post or transmit via social media pictures, depictions, descriptions, or personal information of any victim, witness or suspect, or crime scene or any other information involving previous, current, or future investigations.
2. Members should be mindful of potential safety and security issues they may encounter when identifying themselves as law enforcement officers or members of MPD or disclosing identifying information (e.g., home address, phone number) when participating in social media.
3. Members seeking to manage personal social media sites that are MPD-focused (e.g., personal accounts set up for community engagement) shall obtain permission from the Office of Communications director, through the member’s chain of command, prior to setting up the account. If approved, members shall ensure that all content is posted in compliance with the procedures set forth in this order.
4. Pursuant to [GO-PER-302.08 \[Metropolitan Police Department Wide Area Network \(MPDNet\)\]](#), on-duty members shall limit incidental, personal use of social media to purposes that do not directly or indirectly interfere with the operation of MPD systems or equipment, burden MPD with noticeable incremental cost, violate the provisions of this order, or interfere with members’ duties or other obligations to MPD or District government.
5. Notwithstanding any other provision of this order, a member may post to personal social media accounts if:

Social Media Use
a. He or she expresses a personal viewpoint and does not attribute the viewpoint to the department;
b. He or she does not post any information, images, or material that is confidential or privileged; and
c. He or she does not violate any District of Columbia law.

C. Department-Authorized Use of Social Media

1. Office of Communications staff shall approve public relations social media content. Office of Communications staff members shall maintain the department’s official social media presence. Only members authorized by the Office of Communications staff supervisor shall access official department social media platforms. Office of Communications staff shall maintain a list of approved element social media sites.
2. Due to the public’s First Amendment free speech rights, comments made by a member of the public shall not be deleted except in cases where the content is derogatory in nature, at the discretion of an Office of Communications supervisor.

3. When establishing an official department social media account, the Office of Communications shall ensure that the account includes the following items:

Department Social Media Account Requirements	
a.	Statement that clearly specifies that the account is an official MPD platform;
b.	Statement that indicates that the page is maintained by MPD;
c.	Disclaimer notice that clearly states the page is not monitored at all times;
d.	Information on how MPD should be contacted in case of an emergency;
e.	A link to the MPD website; and
f.	General contact information.

4. Members who represent MPD on official department social media accounts shall ensure that all posts contain the appropriate voice, tone, and use of humor, as applicable. Members shall observe all MPD standards of conduct, established social media protocols, proper, decorum and abide by all copyright, trademark, and service mark restrictions when posting to social media.
5. All social media content shall adhere to applicable laws, regulations, and policies. This applies to information technology standards, records retention regulations, content protected by law through copyright, trademark, and service mark restrictions, and public records laws.
6. Members shall not post statements about the guilt or innocence of a suspect or arrestee, comments concerning pending prosecution, and confidential information.

III. DEFINITIONS

When used in this directive, the following terms shall have the meanings designated.

	Term	Definition
1.	Social media	Online sources that allow people to communicate, share, and exchange information with others via some form of online or cellular network platform (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn). Information may include, but is not limited to, posts, photographs, video, audio, and other multimedia files, message boards, online bulletin boards, and other similarly developed formats, to communicate with others using the same groups while also networking with other users based upon similar interests (e.g., geographical location, skills, occupation, ideology, beliefs).



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