

Victoria Police Manual

The Victoria Police Manual is issued under the authority of the Chief Commissioner of Police in s.60, Victoria Police Act 2013. Non-compliance with or a departure from the Victoria Police Manual may be subject to management or disciplinary action. Employees must use VPM Professional and Ethical Standards to inform the decisions they make to support compliance.

Social media and online engagement

Context

Victoria Police employees must exercise care when using social media and avoid any actions which might be damaging to the reputation or security of our organisation.

VPM Professional and ethical standards applies whether you are using social media in an official or a personal capacity. Employees must conduct themselves in accordance with the Victoria Police values at all times.

Content posted on social media, even content posted in private groups, has the potential to be shared across public facing platforms and will only be considered to be private in limited circumstances. Employees must assess the risks of any comments they post and consider the impacts on themselves and others if the content is shared.

When people use social media, even anonymously or via a pseudonym, they leave an electronic footprint. This means anonymous users can be identified and linked back to Victoria Police. Using social media anonymously is not an excuse for conduct that is inconsistent with our values.

The objectives of this policy are compatible with the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*.

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Definitions

Comment – includes, but is not limited to, writing something; uploading content; liking, sharing or re-posting someone else's content.

Content – refers to text, articles, comments, images, videos, audio recordings and all other multimedia which may be shared online.

Official online activities – includes overt online activity, overt research, discreet and covert activities, refer to **VPM Official online activities**.

Online persona – means a fictitious online identity used legitimately in support of official online

activities on the internet or other computer network. Refer to **VPM Assumed identities and online personas**.

Personal use - is the ordinary use of personal social media accounts, unrelated to employment.

Political content – means any content that overtly or by inference suggests support for a political party or a particular view that is, or is likely to be, the focus of political debate.

Public comment - means a comment made on public facing platforms that are open to anyone where information can be posted, read or shared without restriction. This may include a private comment that becomes a public comment by being shared or disseminated by another person and there was a foreseeable risk of that occurring.

Social media – extends beyond traditional platforms such as Twitter and Facebook and includes (but is not limited to) online forums, networking sites, video and photo sharing websites, blogs and podcasts.

Responsibilities and procedures

1. Official use of social media

1.1 *Making official comment*

As stated in **VPM Corporate communications**, employees must obtain authorisation from the Media, Communications and Engagement Department (MCED) prior to engaging in social media as a representative of Victoria Police. Authorisation is not required when identifying yourself as an employee of Victoria Police on LinkedIn or other professional platforms.

When engaging in social media in an official capacity, employees are required to comply with **VPMP Appropriate use of information**. In addition to those requirements, employees are to:

- disclose they are an employee of Victoria Police and use only their own identity, or an approved official account/avatar
- comment only on information classified as public domain information
- ensure that all content published is accurate and not misleading and complies with Victoria Police and whole of Victorian Government policies (e.g., Victoria Police Manual and Community Safety Statement) and the *Victoria Police Act 2013*
- ensure they are not the first to make an official announcement relating to Victoria Police or the Victorian Government (unless specifically authorised to do so)
- comment only on their area of expertise and authority
- adhere to the Terms and Conditions and other applicable laws, including copyright, privacy, defamation, contempt of court, discrimination and harassment
- obtain approval from the information owner to publish information using the Consent to Post Form; see the **Social media moderation Practice Guide** for further guidance.

1.2 *Community engagement*

- Social media provides a valuable outlet for engaging with the community. The MCED maintains social media sites on behalf of Victoria Police. If an employee

wishes to engage with the community through these sites in an official capacity, contact MCED through the Online Communications PBEA: [ONLINE COMMS – MGR](#).

- **VPM Corporate communications** states that employees or work units must not develop any electronic publications that could be identified as representing, or being associated with Victoria Police, without MCED's authorisation. This includes social media sites.
- Social media accounts authorised by MCED and administered by another work area must be appropriately moderated to ensure content is consistent with Victoria Police values in accordance with the **Social media moderation Practice Guide**.

1.3 *Investigation and intelligence gathering*

- Social media sites are an important investigative tool and source of information for police investigations and intelligence gathering. Investigations and inquiries using social media are to be conducted according to established policies and guidelines, including online personas; refer to **VPM Official online activities** and **VPM Assumed identities and online personas**.
- In conducting such investigations, employees or work units may need to seek an exemption from the requirements that apply to use of the internet and email. To seek an exemption from internet browsing rules or restrictions, complete and submit a Request for Exemption to Internet Browsing Rules [Form 1036A]. Refer to **VPMG Use of email** or **VPMG Use of internet** as required.
- For the requirements for any investigation or intelligence gathering that involves discreet or covert official online activities, refer to **VPM Official online activities** and **VPM Assumed identities and online personas**.

1.4 *Recruiting*

- Social media may be used by Victoria Police to assess potential applicants for VPS, police, Protective Services Officer or Police Custody Officer roles against our values and the standards outlined in **VPM Police and Protective Services Officer recruiting** and the **Code of Conduct for VPS Employees**.
- Hiring managers and employees may share job advertisements with their networks for recruitment purposes. Doing so will not breach this policy.

2. Personal use of social media

2.1 *Personal use with Victoria Police email addresses*

Victoria Police employees must not use Victoria Police email addresses for accessing social media sites for personal use. Doing so risks exposing sensitive information through data breaches.

2.2 *Remain apolitical*

- Victoria Police employees must not make public comments in their capacity as a Victoria Police employee, including on social media, that undermines the apolitical standing of Victoria Police, is critical of its administration or any department/agency of the State of Victoria (s. 95(1)(a), *Constitution Act 1975*). Failure to comply with this policy may result in sanction up to dismissal.
- Whenever making any comments, employees must consider:

- if they intend their comment to be seen 'privately' by a closed audience it may still breach this policy if there is a foreseeable risk it may be shared or disseminated by another person
- if they post their comment anonymously there is a foreseeable risk it will be linked back to their identity and role in Victoria Police
- the requirement to adhere to the Victoria Police Code of Conduct and VPS Code of Conduct at all times.

2.3 *Behavioural standards and expectations*

- It is strongly recommended that employees do not identify themselves as a Victoria Police employee when using social media in a personal capacity. This does not apply to employees using LinkedIn or other professional platforms.
- If an employee identifies themselves as a police employee directly (e.g.: publishing photos of themselves in police uniform, using a police email address or logo, or holding a police badge) or indirectly (e.g.: using their registered number in their personal email address or social media name) they are no longer commenting in a personal capacity and must not comment on police or government policy, or operational or business matters unless expressly authorised to do so. Refer to section 1.1 of this policy.
- Employees must apply the following when using social media in a personal capacity, including when a comment is made from an anonymous account or under a pseudonym:
 - do not use or disclose Victoria Police information; see **VPMP Appropriate use of information**. Employees are reminded of the provisions of ss.227 and 228, *Victoria Police Act* regarding the unauthorised disclosure of information
 - do not post or endorse any obscene, discriminatory, vilifying, defamatory, threatening, bullying, or harassing content
 - do not publish material that might otherwise cause serious damage to public trust in Victoria Police or the reputation of the organisation.
- The requirements of **VPM Conflict of Interest** also apply to online associations.

2.4 *Security, privacy and reputation management*

- Employees must take care when considering what information, including personal information, to include on their social media sites and who to associate with.
- It is strongly recommended that employees do not use their registered numbers in any personal email address. Use of a registered number in an email address has the potential to link an individual to their employment with Victoria Police. Refer to section 2.3 of this policy for further advice.
- Where an employee believes they have been targeted on social media due to their position within Victoria Police, they should advise a supervisor and have their welfare managed under the safe-t-net system.

3. Reporting inappropriate use of social media

- Where an employee believes on reasonable grounds that any other employee is, or has engaged in inappropriate use of social media they have a responsibility to report this behaviour to:

- a more senior employee
 - the Police Conduct Unit, PSC
 - an acting sergeant or above; or
 - the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission (IBAC) in accordance with either s.167(3), *Victoria Police Act 2013* or Part 2 of the *Public Interest Disclosure Act 2012*.
- Complaints are managed in accordance with **VPMG Complaint management and investigations** or **VPMG Public interest disclosures**.

Related documents

- VPM Corporate communications
- Social media moderation Practice Guide
- VPM Official online activities
- VPM Assumed identities and online personas
- VPMG Use of email
- VPMP Use of internet
- VPMP Appropriate use of information
- VPM Conflict of Interest
- VPMG Complaint management and investigations
- VPMG Public interest disclosures.

Further advice and information

For further advice and assistance regarding this policy refer to:

- the Social Media Hub, MCED
- the Online Communications Unit, MCED
- Backstopping and Coordination Unit, Unit 5, Intelligence and Covert Support Command
- your Supervisor.

Update history

DATE UPDATED	SUMMARY OF CHANGE	FORCE FILE NUMBER
20/05/19	Updated from VPMG Social media and online engagement to new format, references to Social media moderation Practice Guide added.	FF-134187
22/06/21	Amendments made to replace “personal use” with “private use” of social media. Instructions expanded relating to remaining apolitical on social media, use of pseudonyms, reporting inappropriate conduct and alignment with Victorian Public Service Commission social media guidance. Minor amendments to language made to	FF-138290 1

	align with VPM style guide.	
23/12/21	Reviewed and updated including updates of terminology from 'private' to 'personal', enhanced instruction to explain 'apolitical', removal of the 'Social media safety' section with content placed on the intranet, advice against the use of registered numbers in email addresses, and enhanced compatibility with the <i>Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act</i> .	FF - 198963