

Proposed Social Media Personnel Polices • Personnel Board

Approved, Personnel Board, November 21, 2022. Incorporates changes considered at a Joint Meeting of the IT Committee and Personnel Board, May 12, 2022, and then suggestions made by Town Counsel. The Personnel Board will present this for consideration in a Public Hearing per Town Bylaws Chapter H, section 5(b).

POLICY NUMBER 35.0

SOCIAL MEDIA ACCEPTABLE USE POLICY

35.1 Purpose

Because social media are in pervasive use every day across our society, guidance for their appropriate use for town business is needed. The use of social media presents many risks and carries with it important responsibilities. This section provides direction to town employees on the use of social media as a means of communication. This policy is intended to clarify the boundaries between appropriate and inappropriate use of social media by employees to help protect their careers and the town's reputation.

Nothing in this Policy is intended to interfere with, restrain, or prevent employee communications or expressions that are protected by law, including, without limitation, the First Amendment of the United States Constitution, State and Federal Whistleblower law, and State and Federal Labor law.

This Policy applies to all Town employees; however, to the extent that this Policy conflicts with the provision(s) of an employee's collective bargaining agreement, such agreement will control.

35.2 Definitions

"Employee" here refers to all Rehoboth town officers, committee members, and employees, regardless of whether elected, appointed, or volunteers. "Town employee" shall have the same meaning as "municipal employee" as defined in G.L. c. 268A, § 1(g).

"Social media" refers to the various forms of electronic communication via the Internet. Social media can include the sharing and exchange of information in the form of electronic data, text, audio, video, images, podcasts, broadcast emails, and web casts and other multimedia communications. Examples include posting text, images, videos, etc., on internet sites or blogs, on

social web pages such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Snapchat, Instagram, TikTok, and other such media, and on open forums and letters to the editor.

“Town equipment” refers to all town electronic equipment, including workstations, laptops, mobile phones, tablets, routers, printers, fax machines, and any other town equipment that may be utilized for transmission of electronic communications. See Policy 29, Information Technology Acceptable Use Policy.

35.3 Social Media Use

In conducting work-related business, employees shall generally not use social media. Approvals to do so must come in writing from the Board of Selectmen, the Town Administrator, or the department head, based on stated business needs. Postings on such approved social media are intended for communicating information with the sole purpose of informing the public of work, news, and updates. Work-related posting on behalf of the town will be done by a department head or their designee. The Town Administrator’s Office will keep current records of who is authorized to use social media for town business.

Employees should not speak to the media on the Town’s behalf unless specifically authorized. Direct all media inquiries to your supervisor or the Town Administrator for the Town’s response.

Caution must be exercised when an employee believes a response is needed to something posted on a social media platform that is work-related. Inform your supervisor or liaison of the need. Even employees authorized to speak for their department or committee must consult a supervisor or liaison when the matter could be sensitive.

Postings by town personnel to social media and any response or reply thereto become public records, subject to [Massachusetts Public Records Law](#). See Policy 29, Information Technology Acceptable Use Policy. All person(s) using social media for town business will record or log the material they communicate using an established process to be determined by the Town. This will ensure retention of a public information record.

Town employees must refrain from using any social media for personal purposes while on work time. Also, at any time, do not use town equipment for personal social media purposes. Never use your work email address(es) to register on social media networks, blogs, or other online tools for personal use. You may share information about your work for the Town of Rehoboth such as would be shared in a typical social exchange: your employer’s name, your job title, or your participation in town sponsored volunteer activities.

The Town reserves the right to monitor behavior on town-owned equipment and software.

35.4 Appropriate Communications by Town Employees

This section provides direction to town employees on the use of social media as a means of communication. The same or similar policies apply to other public communications made by employees concerning town business. Special care is needed, because inappropriate discussion or posts on social media are capable of widespread dissemination.

- Be respectful, never derogatory, sarcastic, or demeaning, even when responding to messages that appear hostile or critical. Avoid joking, teasing, or other ambiguous communications that can be misinterpreted. This rule includes communications with fellow employees, customers, vendors, or other people who work on behalf of or with the Town, and with town citizens. Refer sensitive issues to a supervisor for advice or handling.
- Do not post statements, photographs, video, or audio that might constitute discrimination, harassment, or bullying; or that reasonably could be viewed as malicious, obscene, threatening or intimidating or disparaging to co-workers, clients, vendors, suppliers, other town contacts, or town citizens.
- Employees are expressly prohibited from using social media in a manner that violates the law, including to solicit minors for sex or to violate any other laws regarding minors and their protection as well as to use any sexual or pornographic imagery or material. Employees who violate these provisions will be subject to discipline up to and including termination, as well as referral to authorities for prosecution.
- Never represent yourself as a spokesperson for the Town, as representing an opinion or making a statement about the policy or view of the Town or of any Town employee.
- Public dissemination of confidential information which the employee learns in her/his official capacity is prohibited, as is dissemination of workplace information that, while not confidential, is not yet public information. Always maintain the confidentiality of the Town's proprietary and/or otherwise confidential information, as well as health care information and personal protected information that may be maintained by the Town concerning Town personnel or residents. Do not post reports, policies, procedures or other internal communications.
- Never disseminate rumors or information that you know might be false about the Town, fellow employees, customers, suppliers, people working on behalf of or with the Town, or town citizens.

- Do not post anywhere the Town’s logo, images of co-workers, customers, vendors, third parties who participate in the workplace, or images of the Town’s premises, property, or equipment, without prior written authorization from the Town Administrator. Do not wear any Town uniform or display Town insignia in any social media postings.
- Do not take, make, or publish in any forum photographs, video or audio transmissions, or recordings of Town proceedings or operations, including social media sites, other internet sites, print or broadcast news media, or elsewhere, except if specifically authorized to do so for Town business-related purposes.
- In personal postings and communications, if the Town is a subject of the content you are creating, be clear and open about the fact that you are an employee and make it clear that your views do not represent those of the Town, fellow employees, customers, vendors, or other people working on behalf of the Town. Include a disclaimer such as “The postings on this site are my own and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Town of Rehoboth.”

35.5 Monitoring and Enforcement

Failure to comply with this policy may result in disciplinary action up to and including termination of employment.

The Board of Selectmen will designate an office/official who will monitor work-related content on social media. The Town can modify, remove, or correct any messages or postings that it deems, in its sole discretion, to be abusive, defamatory, and in violation of intellectual property, state, or federal law; or that is inaccurate, misleading, or unauthorized; or that violates the principles of appropriate use in section 35.4.

In no instance will an employee be disciplined, retaliated against or discharged for good faith reporting of possible deviations from this policy.

A copy of this policy will be distributed to all employees, including un-paid volunteers, and to committee members through their committee chairs. A sign-off will indicate having received and read the policy.