

<b>TITLE: SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY</b>	<b>NUMBER 16.8</b>
<b>EFFECTIVE DATE: 09-15-2011</b>	<b>PAGE 1 OF 3</b>
<b>REVISION HISTORY: (Adopted 09-15-2011)</b>	

#### **16.6.1 PURPOSE**

The intent of this policy is to supplement the City of Greensboro's policy, "Employee Use of Social Networks", to ensure ethical, effective, and lawful police applications. Should there be a conflict between this policy and the city's policy, the most restrictive policy takes precedence. This policy establishes this 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.

#### **16.6.2. POLICY**

The department endorses the use of social media to enhance communication, collaboration, and information exchange; streamline processes; and foster productivity. Social media provides a new and potentially valuable means of assisting the department and its personnel in meeting community outreach, problem-solving, investigative, crime prevention, recruitment, and related objectives. This policy identifies potential uses that may be explored or expanded upon as deemed reasonable by administrative and supervisory personnel. The department also recognizes the role that these tools play in the personal lives of some department personnel. 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.

#### **16.6.3 PROFESSIONAL USE**

##### General Provisions:

1. With the exception of covert sites established for investigative purposes, all department social media sites or pages shall be approved by the Public Information Officer. Requestors shall follow the procedures outlined in the City of Greensboro policy "Employee Use of Social Networks".
2. GPD social media sites shall follow the organizational rules outlined in the City of Greensboro policy "Employee Use of Social Networks".
3. Social media page(s) shall be designed for the target audience(s) such as youth or potential police recruits.
4. Department personnel representing the department via social media outlets shall:
  - (a) Conduct themselves at all times as representatives of the department and, accordingly, shall adhere to all department standards of conduct and observe conventionally accepted protocols and proper decorum.
  - (b) Identify themselves as a member of the department.
  - (c) Not make statements about the guilt or innocence of any suspect or arrestee, or comments concerning pending prosecutions, nor post, transmit, or otherwise disseminate confidential information, including photographs or videos, related to department training, activities, or work-related assignments without express written permission of the Chief of Police or his designee.

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Potential Uses:

1. Social media is a valuable investigative tool when seeking evidence or information about
  - a. missing persons;
  - b. wanted persons;
  - c. gang participation;
  - d. crimes perpetrated online (i.e., cyberbullying, cyberstalking); and
  - e. photos or videos of a crime posted by a participant or observer.
2. Social media can be used for community outreach and engagement by
  - a. providing crime prevention tips;
  - b. offering online-reporting opportunities;
  - c. sharing crime maps and data; and
  - d. soliciting tips about unsolved crimes (i.e., Crime Stoppers, text-a-tip).
3. Social media can be used to make time-sensitive notifications related to
  - a. road closures,
  - b. special events,
  - c. weather emergencies, and
  - d. missing or endangered persons.
4. Persons seeking employment and volunteer positions use the Internet to search for opportunities, and social media can be a valuable recruitment mechanism.
5. This department has an obligation to include Internet-based content when conducting background investigations of job candidates.
6. Searches should be conducted by a non-decision maker.
7. Persons authorized to search Internet-based content should be deemed as holding a sensitive position.
8. Search methods shall not involve techniques that are a violation of existing law.
9. Vetting techniques shall be applied uniformly to all candidates.
10. Every effort must be made to validate Internet-based information considered during the hiring process.

#### **16.6.4 PERSONAL USE**

Department personnel shall abide by the following when using social media:

1. 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 coworkers, or negatively affect the public perception of the department.
2. 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—is not 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 will reflect upon their office and this department.
3. Department personnel shall not post, transmit, or otherwise disseminate any information to which they have access as a result of their employment without written permission from the Chief of Police, or designee.

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4. 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 code of conduct is required in the personal use of social media. In particular, department personnel are prohibited from the following:
  - a. 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.
  - b. Speech involving themselves or other department personnel reflecting behavior that would reasonably be considered reckless or irresponsible.
5. Engaging in prohibited speech noted herein, may provide grounds for undermining or impeaching an officer's testimony in criminal proceedings. Department personnel thus sanctioned are subject to discipline up to and including termination.
6. Department personnel may not divulge information gained by reason of their authority; make any statements, speeches, appearances, and endorsements; or publish materials that could reasonably be considered to represent the views or positions of this department without express authorization from the Chief of Police.
7. Department personnel should be aware that they may be subject to civil litigation for:
  - a. publishing or posting false information that harms the reputation of another person, group, or organization (defamation);
  - b. 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;
  - c. using someone else's name, likeness, or other personal attributes without that person's permission for an exploitative purpose; or
  - d. publishing the creative work of another, trademarks, or certain confidential business information without the permission of the owner.
8. 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.
9. 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.