



## Policy Manual

Section:	Office of the CAO, Communications
Subject:	<b>Personal Use of Social Media</b>
Policy Number:	24
Approval Date:	June 2, 2014
Approved By:	Council (Resolution #R14-06-290)
Prepared By:	Manager of Communications

### Purpose

The Town of Essex ("Town") strives to maintain a positive image in the community and has adopted this policy to ensure that employees and volunteers are aware of their responsibility to maintain a positive image as a representative of the Town. While the Town respects the separation between work and private life, the Town's employees and volunteers must understand that if they maintain personal social media pages (for example, on Facebook, LinkedIn, or Twitter) or engage in online communication, they are expected to comply with the guidelines set out in the Employee Personal Use of Social Media Policy.

Employees are reminded that, on or off duty, their actions and comments may be perceived to be an extension of their employer, the Town. Employees should conduct themselves in a manner that is appropriate and in accordance with this policy.

### Scope

This policy applies to all Town of Essex employees, firefighters, temporary and contract employees, appointees to agencies, boards, commissions and committees, volunteers, and any group or individual retained by the Town to act on the Town's behalf.

This policy applies to those digital spaces where people may comment, contribute, create, forward, post, upload and share content. As new social networking tools are regularly appearing on the Internet, it is not possible to expressly refer to or list specific tools. The

absence of a list of specific social networking tools, however, does not limit the application of this policy.

## Definitions

**Confidential Information** refers to information that is not generally available to the public and is used in the course of our operations. It includes sensitive information and personal information about employees, taxpayers, customers, volunteers, vendors, suppliers, elected officials, citizens, and other stakeholders.

**Intellectual Property** describes a set of intangible rights held by musicians, authors, artists and inventors over ownership of their intellectual and creative output. It legally excludes others from using intellectual property without prior written permission. Intellectual property may have commercial value and encompasses the areas of Copyright, Trademarks, Patents and Design.

**Online Communications** refers to the sharing of information for any purpose through the use of the Internet, including website development and maintenance, online advertising, and social networking. In particular, social networking tools, like Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and YouTube, focus on building online communities of people who share interests through two-way communication.

**Social Media** describes the tools that people use to build online profiles and share content, opinions, insights, experiences and perspectives in an online environment. These tools are also called **Social Networking Tools**.

## Responsibility

The Chief Administrative Officer is responsible for ensuring compliance with this policy.

The Manager of Communications is responsible, as a centralized resource, for managing and monitoring all corporate social media accounts, as well as for the creation and maintenance of content on those sites. In this capacity, the Manager of Communications is responsible for monitoring all comments and reporting inappropriate or sensitive content.

All employees and volunteers, in their personal capacity, are accountable for publishing information on the Internet, including social networking sites, that complies with this policy.

## Policy Guidelines

Town staff members and volunteers that maintain personal social media pages or accounts are required to comply with the following guidelines as they relate to their association with the Town of Essex.

Employees will be held accountable for what they write or post on social media or Internet pages. No online communication should be considered to be private. Inflammatory comments, unprofessional remarks, or disparaging remarks made about the Town, its employees, volunteers, customers, vendors, elected officials, business or affairs may be considered to be serious misconduct and may result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment or, in the case of a volunteer, termination of engagement.

Employees are encouraged to follow the guidelines below when making posts or comments on any social media or Internet site, whether it is public or private.

1. Without limitation to the general rules described in this policy, the following types of online communications will be considered unacceptable:
  - Communication that discloses proprietary, confidential or sensitive information related to the Town, its employees, volunteers, vendors, suppliers, elected officials, citizens, business or affairs. This includes posting on personal social media sites photos that were taken during the course of employment.
  - Communication that is disparaging of the Town, its employees, volunteers, vendors, suppliers, elected officials, citizens, business or affairs, or is reasonably believed to bring the Town, its employees, volunteers, vendors, suppliers, elected officials, citizens, its business or affairs into disrepute;
  - Communication that is discriminatory, offensive or intolerant in nature, or contains sexual content or sexual innuendo regarding co-workers, management, volunteers, vendors, suppliers, elected officials or citizens.
  - Communication that contains defamatory statements regarding the Town, its employees, volunteers, vendors, suppliers, elected officials or citizens; and
  - Communication that significantly affects the Town's legitimate interests or impedes the ability of any Town employee to perform their job.
2. Only authorized spokespersons may speak on behalf of the Town through social media.

3. Avoid becoming an unofficial Town spokesperson. Where an employee or volunteer engages in online communication and makes reference to the Town, the employee or volunteer is expected to include a disclaimer or other statement confirming that the opinions or comments expressed represent personal opinions and do not represent the Town's views or opinions.

Sample disclaimer: "The comments on this site are my own and do not necessarily represent the views or opinions of my employer."

Such a disclaimer does not reduce or negate the employee's or volunteer's obligation to adhere to these policy guidelines.

4. Communication through the use of personal social media must also be consistent and in compliance with other Town policies. This includes but is not limited to the Code of Conduct for Members of Council and Employees, Communications and Media Relations Policy, Corporate Use of Social Media Policy, Computer Data Sharing, Internet and Email Use Policy, Respectful Workplace Policy, and Workplace Harassment Policy.
5. There should be no expectation of privacy in online communications. Public and third party access is inherent and likely, no matter the safeguards placed on the communication by the user. In addition, all Internet access and online communication made at work may be monitored by the Town.
6. Town policies governing the use of corporate logos and other forms of branding and identity apply to electronic communications. Employees and volunteers are not allowed to use the Town's protected intellectual property, including materials subject to copyright and trademark protections (like logos, wordmarks and crests), without prior express written permission.

This policy is not intended to interfere with the private lives of our staff members, or impinge their right to freedom of speech. This policy is designed to ensure that the Town's image and branding are maintained and remain unimpugned.

Employees should abide by these guidelines whether they mention the Town by name or not. Even if the name is not mentioned in a post, it is possible a link can be made back to the Town which can negatively affect the Town's reputation. Where a link can be made between a negative or inflammatory post and the Town of Essex, even if not named directly, the employee may be in breach of these guidelines.

## References and Related Documents

Other applicable policies and legislation include but are not limited to the following:

- Copyright Act

- Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act
- Ontario Health and Safety Act
- Town of Essex Code of Conduct for Members of Council and Employees
- Town of Essex Communications and Media Relations Policy
- Town of Essex Computer Data Sharing, Internet and Email Use Policy
- Town of Essex Corporate Graphic Standards Policy (in development)
- Town of Essex Corporate Use of Social Media Policy
- Town of Essex Respectful Workplace Policy
- Town of Essex Workplace Harassment Policy

## Acknowledgement

I, \_\_\_\_\_, acknowledge that I have read and understand the Employee Personal use of Social Media Policy.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_