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Department:
Environment & Nature Conservation
NORTHERN CAPE PROVINCE
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Private Bag X6102, Kimberley, 8300, Metlife Towers, T-Floor, Tel: 053 807 7300, Fax: 053 807 7328

DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT AND NATURE CONSERVATION

SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

ADMIN SUPPORT SERVICES: COMMUNICATIONS UNIT
16 SEPTEMBER 2013
VERSION 01

"A PROSPEROUS AND EQUITABLE SOCIETY LIVING IN HARMONY WITH OUR NATURAL RESOURCES"

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1. CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The rise in social media platform provides an opportunity for government to improve interaction with the public thereby improving service delivery. Available social media sites such as Facebook, YouTube or twitter provide new options for better interactive capabilities without substantial cost.

Recognising social media as a communication tool that has impact on organisational and personal reputation, this policy serve to create staff awareness in understanding their responsibilities around using social media in their professional and personal capacity.

1.2 LEGISLATIVE REQUIREMENTS

- **GCIS Guidelines**
- **Labour Relations Act (No. 66 of 1995)**
- **Public Service code of conduct**
- **PAJA & PAIA**

DEFINITIONS

Social media refers to internet based tools for sharing and discussing information, experiences, insights and opinions amongst people.

Social Media Channels - Blogs, micro-blogs, wikis, social networks, social bookmarking services, user rating services and any other online collaboration, sharing or publishing platform, whether accessed through the web, a mobile device, text messaging, email or any other existing or emerging communications platform

Face Book is a social networking website that allows registered users to create profiles, upload photos and video, send messages and keep in touch with friends, family and colleagues.

Twitter is an online social networking service and microblogging services that enables its users to send and receive text based messages of up to 140 characters

Tweets is a 140 character social media disclosure distributed on the twitter micro-blogging service

Retweets are tweets from one twitter user that are redistributed by another tweeter user. Retweets are how information propagates on Twitter.

Social Media Disclosures - Blog posts, blog comments, status updates, text messages, posts via email, images, audio recordings, video recordings or any other information made available through a social media channel. Social media disclosures are the actual communications a user distributes through a social media channel, usually by means of their social media account

External vs. Internal Social Media Channels – Internal social media channels are located at a company- owned domain, require a password to access and are only visible to employees and other approved individuals. External social media channels are social media services that do not reside at a domain.

Controversial Issues – Issues that form the basis of heated debate, often identified in political campaigns as wedge issues, since they provoke a strong emotional response. Examples include political views, health care reform, gun control and abortion. Religious beliefs may also be controversial, particularly to those intolerant of beliefs different from their own.

Official Content – Publicly available online content created and made public by our company, verified by virtue of the fact that it is accessible through our corporate website

2. POLICY STATEMENT AND APPLICATION SCOPE

2.1 POLICY STATEMENT

This policy provides guidance to the employees of DENC in order to make appropriate decisions in the use of social media such as Facebook, twitter and any other relevant social media site that will be introduced later.

This policy outlines the standards required to be observed when using social media and the action that the organisation will take in respect of breaches of this policy.

OBJECTIVES

Where an official is permitted to use social media in accordance with this policy must adhere to the following general rules:

- Establish practical, reasonable and enforceable guidelines by which employees can conduct responsible constructive social media engagement in both official and unofficial capacities.
- Promote a safe environment for employees to share subject matter expertise and earn management's recognition for the outstanding use of social media for business.
- Prepare the department and employees to utilise social media channels to inform and assist each other and the communities served.
- Protect the organisation and employees from violating laws and regulations through social media channels.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The organizations trusts and expects employees to exercise personal responsibility whenever they use social media, which includes not violating the trust of those with whom they are engaging. Employees should never use social media for covert advocacy, marketing or public relations as conflict of interest might arise. If and when employees use social media to communicate on behalf of the Department, they should clearly identify themselves as employees.

Only those officially designated employees can use social media to speak on behalf of the Department in an official capacity. Employees may use personal social media to speak for themselves individually or to exercise their legal rights under the Labor Relations Act.

When there is a misrepresentation made about the Department by media, analyst,

bloggers or other social media users, officials are encouraged to report such to the designated official.

Different social media channels have proper and improper business uses. For example, members of social networks are expected to read, and when appropriate respond, to questions asked of them from another member of their social network. It is important for employees to understand what is recommended, expected and required when they discuss or -related topics, whether at work or on their own time.

Employees should ensure that all contractors, vendors and agencies that the Department has a formal relationship with have received and agreed to abide by these guidelines in writing.

Employees should ensure that their online activities do not interfere with their ability to fulfill their job requirements or their commitments to their managers, co-workers or customers.

The use of social media to communicate opinions about the Department is not allowed and is a disciplinary offence.

Any member of staff who feels harassed or offended by material posted should inform the Manager: Admin Support Services

AUTHORISED REPRESENTATIVES:

- The Head of the Department
- The Programme Manager: Administrative Support Services
- The Head of Communication/Media Liaison Officer
- Delegated Senior Managers

COMMUNICATIONS UNIT

The communication unit must:

- ensure that all content published is accurate and complies with all departmental policies
- disclose and comment only on information classified as public domain
- be both proactive and responsive to comments made
- acknowledge and respond immediately if a mistake is made through comment
- Report on number of subscribers, number of comments made both positive and negative to assist in analysing the environment.

EMPLOYEES

DENC recognises the importance of staff joining in and helping shape public thinking about the organisation, services, employees and stakeholders.

Therefore, officials should comply with this policy and ensure that it is consistently applied. Any breach of this policy should be reported to the Director: Admin Support Services.

Since reputations are built on trust, employees are requested to disclose their identity and affiliation to the Department whenever discussing the Department or department -related topics via social media channels, so long as they can do so without forfeiting their legal rights under the Labour Relations Act.

The Department recognizes and appreciates the rights of individuals to free speech and shall always be respectful of every individual's legal right to express their opinions, whether those opinions are complimentary or critical. Respectfulness, imply tolerance and consideration for the opinions and positions of others, whether they are in alignment or conflict with your own.

Employees are encouraged to always strive to add value to online conversations by advancing the dialogue in a constructive meaningful way.

Employees who choose to make social media disclosures about topics relevant to the Department should always be aware that their disclosures are not private or temporary. Social media disclosures live online indefinitely, and should remember that they will be visible to a broad audience and possible even read out of context.

In times of an emergency or crisis only employees with the authority to speak on behalf of the Department are permitted to do so. If an employee who is not authorized to speak on behalf of the company has valuable information that could benefit those affected by a crisis or emergency, they may share that information with designated official.

Whilst, only those officially designated by the Head of Department are authorized to speak on behalf of the Department, all employees are encouraged to share official content via social media channels, so as long they verify that information is in fact official. For example, before sharing a link, employees should always verify that the source of the information is legitimate.

Before retweeting someone else's tweet, verify that the Twitter user cited did, in fact, distribute that tweet. This is to curb false tweets attributed to news sources that will promote misinformation and confusion.

Keep personal social media activities distinct from government communication

Activity on social media site during office hours should complement and/or support your role and should be used in moderation.

Officials should be aware and understand the potential risks and damage to the department's reputation that can occur either directly or indirectly and therefore should comply with policy to minimise risks.

If an official is unsure about information to share the Security Manager should be consulted

2.2 APPLICATION SCOPE

This policy will apply to all officials of the Department of Environment and Nature Conservation.

3. POLICY FRAMEWORK

3.1 IDENTIFICATION AND CONSULTATION OF STAKEHOLDERS

This policy document was distributed to staff members within the department and their feedback and inputs are included where changes were suggested and motivated. Information sessions were also held as part of the consultation process. The recognized Labour Unions are not excluded in the process as they do have shop stewards within the department, and them being part of the departmental staff, thus had the opportunity to participate in the process. Furthermore, it needs to be mentioned that the department cannot negotiate with the Unions (Organized Labour) as a separate entity on this policy. Especially, because there are matters of mutual interests that must be dealt with in the formal structures created for this purpose, such as the Provincial Bargaining Council.

3.2 TIMEFRAMES

On April 15, 2013 a draft of this policy was analysed by the corporate policy unit who submitted their comments on the policy. The policy will be attached to the Communications policy as **Annexure C** during its review in 2014.

3.3 IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

It is the responsibility of the Head of department to ensure that this policy is carefully followed within the department. All managers should make members of their employees aware of the obligation to familiarize themselves with and follow this policy.

An implementation plan will be drafted which will outline how and when this policy will be implemented. The plan will be drafted two months after the implementation date of this policy. In order to ensure adequate implementation of this policy the human resource unit will compile an infrastructure investment (in terms of human capital) and policy management plan. The plan will be updated on an annual basis and will contain details on future guidelines for this policy. The financial implications if any will be indicated on the plan in order to ensure that funds are available or availed.

The implementation date for this policy is 01 April 2014

3.4 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

This policy will be funded by the Communications Unit.

3.5 COMMUNICATION

- Office of the Premier
- GCIS
- National Department of Environmental Affairs

3.6 COMPLIANCE, MONITORING AND EVALUATION (M&E)

The Head of Communication has overall responsibility for the effective operation of this policy. This includes monitoring and reviewing the operation of the policy and making recommendations for changes to minimise risks to operations.

Only the authorised officials are permitted to post material on behalf of the organisation. Any breach of this restriction will amount to misconduct.

Employees should adhere to policy, which is created to assist employees adhere to all laws, regulations, and other legal requirements that apply to Departmental business.

3.7 POLICY REVIEW

This policy will be reviewed when the need arises or in case of the occurrence of extenuating circumstances (political mitigation, or pronouncement by legislation and/or regulations). The contact person for this policy will be required to submit all relevant information pertaining to this policy in conjunction with a signed memo with all amendments (addition or omission) during the third quarter annually.

The exception, the Policy development unit will be conducting all extenuating reviews throughout the year, therefore it is paramount that any new information received be submitted to this unit, in order to coordinate the review process of this policy.

3.8 POLICY IMPACT

The desire of this policy is to guide employees in the use of social media as a medium of distributing official information.

3.9 INTERIM MEASURES

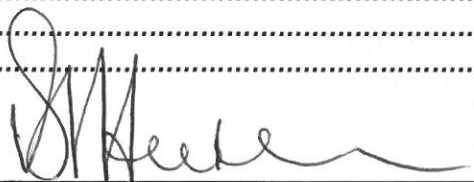
This is an interim document for this Department until such time that a provincial policy has been developed.

4. ADOPTION OF POLICY

Approved / ~~Not Approved~~

Comments:

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D VAN HEERDEN
HEAD OF DEPARTMENT

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DATE



