

Department Use of Social Media

390.1 PURPOSE AND SCOPE

The purpose of this policy is to establish guidelines for the appropriate use, management, and oversight of official social media accounts operated by the Vancouver Police Department.

Social media is a powerful communication tool to engage with the public, share critical information, and promote transparency

This policy does not address all aspects of social media use. Specifically, it does not address:

- Personal use of social media by Vancouver Police Department members (see the Employee Speech, Expression and Social Networking Policy).
- Use of social media in personnel processes
- Use of social media as part of a criminal investigation, other than disseminating information to the public on behalf of the Vancouver Police Department (see the Investigation, UAS and Police Camera Program Policy).

This policy applies to:

- All department sworn and professional staff.
- Contractors or vendors managing the department's social media

390.1.1 DEFINITIONS

Definitions related to this policy include:

- Social media - Any of a wide array of internet-based tools and platforms that allow for the sharing of information, such as the Vancouver Police Department website or social networking services which may include, but are not limited to Facebook, Instagram, X, Nextdoor, Snapchat, YouTube, Tik Tok, or blogging platforms.
- Official Social Media Account: Any social media profile created or operated on behalf of the agency.
- Authorized Personnel: Individuals designated by the Chief, their designee or Public Affairs Manager to manage or post on official accounts.

390.2 POLICY

The Vancouver Police Department will use social media as a method of effectively informing the public about department services, issues, investigations, recruitment, and other relevant events.

Vancouver Police staff, sworn and professional, shall ensure that the use or access of social media is done in a manner that protects the constitutional rights of all people.

Information will focus on transparency and may include the use of photos and video and audio, to include video captured by VPD personnel, Body Worn Camera, in-car (Fleet) video or Uncrewed Aircraft System (UAS). The Police Camera Policy and UAS Policy also has information on public relations purposes for use of these department-captured videos.

Department Use of Social Media

390.3 AUTHORIZED USERS

Only members authorized by the Office of the Chief, or designee, may post content or administer official department social media channels on behalf of the Vancouver Police Department.

Authorized members shall use only department-approved equipment during the normal course of duties to post and monitor department-related social media, unless they are specifically authorized to do otherwise by their supervisor.

The department may develop specific guidelines identifying the type of content that may be posted. Any content that does not strictly conform to the guidelines should be approved by a supervisor prior to posting.

Requests to post information over official department social media by members who are not authorized to post should be made through the member's chain of command.

Authorized members shall review all content prior to posting to ensure that the posting does not contain prohibited content.

390.4 AUTHORIZED CONTENT

Only content that is appropriate for public release, that supports the mission, and that conforms to all policies regarding the release of information may be posted. Posted information, to include video and/or audio, will reflect the facts and accuracy of the incident as documented in official sources to include police reports, Body Worn Camera video, other department created video, or from involved personnel. Video and audio may be redacted to protect the identity of individual members of the public. Arrested individuals' identity may be released as allowed by law. Posts may include music and/or other audio. All music must adhere to appropriate licensing, use or copyright laws. Content may also include shared, re-purposed or re-posted content from other sources that meet the criteria of this policy.

Examples of authorized content include, but are not limited to:

- Share public safety information (e.g., weather alerts, traffic issues, crime prevention tips)
- Post updates on major incidents or investigations, as cleared for release
- Promote agency events and community engagement efforts
- Recognize employee achievements or milestones Provide information, to include the use of visuals (e.g. photos, audio, video-including the use of Body Worn Camera (BWC), in-car video or UAS video) highlighting the work of department personnel and the response to incidents.
- Announcements.
- Tips and information related to crime prevention.
- Investigative requests for information.
- Requests that ask the community to engage in projects that are relevant to the Vancouver Police Department mission.

Department Use of Social Media

- Real-time safety information that is related to in-progress crimes, geographical warnings, or disaster information.
- Traffic information.
- Media releases.
- Recruitment of personnel.
- Information related to police response to an incident, for purposes of increased transparency or the work of police personnel.
- Critical incident videos.

The Office of the Chief maintains ultimate decision-making and control over all social media content on official department sites.

390.4.1 INCIDENT-SPECIFIC USE

In instances of active incidents and critical incidents where speed, accuracy and frequent updates are paramount (e.g., crime alerts, public safety information, urgent traffic issues,), the Public Affairs Manager, or the authorized designee, will be responsible for the compilation of information to be released.

In critical incidents where an Incident Command System is in place, information release will be in coordination between the Public Affairs Manager and Incident Commander or another authorized designee.

In the event of a critical incident:

- Only the Public Affairs Manager, or designee, may post updates.
 - All posts should be timely, factual, and pre-approved by the Incident Commander when possible.
- Coordination with emergency management and media outlets will be prioritized.

390.5 PROHIBITED CONTENT

Content that is prohibited from posting includes, but is not limited to:

- Content that is abusive, discriminatory, inflammatory or sexually explicit.
- Any information that violates individual rights, including confidentiality and/or privacy rights and those provided under state, federal or local laws.
- Any information that could compromise an ongoing investigation.
- Any information that could tend to compromise or damage the mission, function, reputation or professionalism of the Vancouver Police Department or its members.

Vancouver Police Department

Vancouver PD Policy Manual

Department Use of Social Media

- Any information that could compromise the safety and security of Vancouver Police Department operations, department members, victims, suspects or the public.
- Any confidential, sensitive, or protected information (e.g., victim names, juvenile identities)
- Political, religious, or personal opinions
- Inflammatory, biased, or unverified content
- Any content posted for personal use
- Commentary on active investigations or court cases without Public Affairs Manager approval
- Any content that has not been properly authorized by this policy or a supervisor

Any member who becomes aware of content on Vancouver Police Departments social media site(s) that he/she believes is unauthorized or inappropriate should promptly report such content to a supervisor. The supervisor will investigate the cause of the entry and report it through their chain of command.

Upon receiving notification of content that is in violation of this policy, the Public Affairs Manager will review the content for possible removal.

390.5.1 PUBLIC POSTING PROHIBITED

Vancouver Police Department social media sites shall be designed and maintained to prevent posting of content by the public.

Public comment is allowed and covered by the: [Social Media, Web and Mobile Platform Comment Policy](#) policy.

The department will provide a method for members of the public to contact the Vancouver Police Department directly with a link to the Vancouver Police Department website from each department social media site, when possible.

390.6 MONITORING CONTENT

Comments on official pages will be monitored and may be hidden if they:

- Contain hate speech, threats, or profanity
- Promote illegal activity
- Violate the agency's or City of Vancouver Public Comment section of the Social Media Policy: [Social Media, Web and Mobile Platform Comment Policy](#)
- Users may be blocked in extreme cases, in accordance with legal precedent regarding public forums.

Department Use of Social Media

390.7 RETENTION OF RECORDS

The Public Affairs Manager, or their designee, should work with the Audit Sergeant to establish a method of ensuring that public records generated in the process of social media use are retained in accordance with established records retention schedules.

390.8 TRAINING

Authorized members shall receive training that, at a minimum, addresses legal issues concerning the appropriate use of social media sites, as well as privacy, civil rights, dissemination and retention of information posted on Vancouver Police Department sites.

- All authorized users must complete training on:
- This policy
- Proper content creation
- Legal considerations (e.g., public records, defamation)

The Public Affairs Manager will review, at least annually, the department social media accounts, the resources being used, the effectiveness of the content, any unauthorized or inappropriate content, and the resolution of any issues.