



DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

POLICY 1.75 - USE OF ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATIONS AND SOCIAL MEDIA

APPLICATION:

All state employees, including employees of agencies exempt from coverage of the Virginia Personnel Act, must abide by this policy. State employees under the Virginia Personnel Act are subject to disciplinary actions for violations of this policy.

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this policy is to ensure the appropriate, responsible, and safe use of electronic communications, Internet, and social media by employees. Agencies may supplement this policy as necessary provided such supplement is consistent with this policy.

POLICY SUMMARY:

This policy establishes standards and expectations of employees and other non-employees who are provided access to the Commonwealth of Virginia's electronic communications, Internet use and social media platforms to include:

1. Employee Responsibilities and Requirements
2. Agency Responsibilities and Requirements
3. Glossary and Relevant Terms
4. Attachment A – Certificate of Receipt

AUTHORITY:

This policy is issued by the Department of Human Resource Management (DHRM) pursuant to the authority provided in [Title 2.2 of the Code of Virginia](#). The Director of the Department of Human Resource Management is responsible for the official interpretation of this policy, in accordance with Chapter 12, [Article §2.2-1201 of the Code of Virginia](#). DHRM reserves the right to revise or eliminate this policy.

RELATED POLICIES:

[Policy 1.60 - Standards of Conduct](#)

[DHRM Policy 1.61 - Teleworking](#)

[DHRM Policy 2.35 - Civility in the Workplace](#)

[VITA - Information Security Standard SEC530-01](#)

[VITA - Use of Non-Commonwealth Computing Devices to Telework Policy \(SEC511\)](#)

RECORD OF CHANGES:

Version History	
Date	Change Summary
08-01-2001	Policy published.
03-17-2011	Policy revised.
01-04-2024	Policy revised. All links validated and updated where applicable.



**DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT POLICY POLICY 1.75 -
USE OF ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATIONS AND SOCIAL MEDIA
ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURES**

PROCEDURES:

EMPLOYEE RESPONSIBILITIES

General Provisions	Application
Abide by policy	<p>Users must comply with the Commonwealth of Virginia's Policy 1.75, Use of Electronic Communications and Social Media, and other related DHRM policies.</p> <p>Users must also comply with their Agency's supplemental policies specific to their use of the Agency's electronic communications, applications, and business-related social media.</p>
Electronic Communications	<p>All means of electronic-based communication or posting of content on Internet sites using equipment, tools and applications owned or used by the Commonwealth.</p>
Business Use of Agency-owned Equipment or Systems	<p>Agency provided electronic communications tools and Agency social media accounts and related applications are the property of the Commonwealth provided to conduct State business in an effective and efficient manner.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Users are permitted access to the Internet, electronic communication tools and Agency's social media accounts to perform and conduct Agency business.• Users must adhere to security protocols as detailed in the Virginia Information Technologies Agency (VITA) policies and supplemental Agency policies regarding the use of electronic communications and social media.• Users must communicate their accurate identities and state their affiliation when using electronic communications or social media for business purposes.• Users must ensure information is accurate prior to posting on social media sites, state or agency websites, or other electronic media sites. If it is discovered that information is inaccurate after posting, users should work to quickly correct the errors.

General Provisions	Application
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Users must secure sensitive or confidential information when communicating electronically or posting information on internal or external websites including social media. • Users must include contact information in all emails and ensure Agency phone numbers are included
<p>Personal Use of Agency-Owned Equipment, Applications and/or Systems</p>	<p>Personal use of Agency-provided equipment, software, applications, electronic communications, and social media means the use is not job-related and does not support the Agency's business operational needs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approved users should generally refrain from using Agency equipment, applications, and electronic communications for their personal use. However, incidental, infrequent, or occasional personal use is permitted provided it does not interfere with or adversely impact: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The user's productivity or work performance. ○ The productivity or work performance of fellow employees, contractors, or consultants performing or providing services to the Commonwealth or Agency. ○ The efficient operations, business interests of the Commonwealth or create security risks for Agency's systems and networks. ○ Third parties, such as vendors or consultants performing or providing services to the Commonwealth or Agency; or ○ Services provided to customers/citizens and public perception of the Agency's credibility and business operations. • Users are advised to use their personal email addresses and other personal accounts that are not connected to their employer when communicating or posting information for personal use. • Users are encouraged to use a disclaimer when posting personal views or opinions such as, <i>"The views expressed on this (website, blog, social media site) are my own and do not reflect the views of my employer or of the Commonwealth of Virginia."</i> when appropriate, to ensure these views are not viewed as official Commonwealth of Virginia communications.

Requirements for Employees, Contractors, or Consultants

When using the Commonwealth's electronic communications tools, systems and social media, users shall:

- Follow all applicable policies of the Commonwealth and supplemental agency policies, federal or state laws or regulations to include copyrights, and trademarks.
- Conduct themselves in a professional and responsible manner that supports their agency's operational business activities and credibility.
- Exercise appropriate care to protect the agencies or Commonwealth's electronic communications tools against the introduction of viruses, spyware, malware, or other harmful attacks.
- Use the Internet, electronic communications tools, and social media only in accordance with State and Agency policy.
- Maintain secured access of systems and data to include safeguarding passwords and login IDs as directed and intended in the conduct of state and agency business.
- Demonstrate respect for the agency/organization, other employees, customers, vendors, and others when posting and communicating information.
- Exercise sensitivity when referring to or including others in communications or posts and avoid potential liabilities.
- Seek permission before posting photos of state employees, contractors, vendors, or private citizens.
- Protect sensitive and confidential data and refrain from posting information regarding the development of or use of the Commonwealth's technology systems and related processes.
- Refrain from communications and social media posts that serve to denigrate, intimidate, bully, or alienate other colleagues, customers, vendors, or others with whom business-related activities or services occur.
- Avoid linking personal blogs, website, personal social media, or networking accounts to those owned by the Commonwealth.
- Ensure that the agency-provided email address is used for agency business and is not used to register on social media accounts or for other personal use.
- Unless comments have been expressly authorized by Agency management, take steps to ensure that personal opinions or comments indicate that "The postings on this site are my own personal views and do not represent the views of my Agency."
- Direct media inquiries regarding agency business interests or operations to the Agency's Communications Officer.
- Avoid posting rumors or false information. Correct mistakes promptly noting that deleted posts or comments are archived and may still be accessible.
- Retain electronic communications subject to the public's release via the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA.)

Requirements for Agency Supervisors/Managers

- Ensure employees have access to, read, acknowledge receipt, and are trained on this policy and all related policies as required for system access and use.
- Require and retain Policy 1.75 Acknowledgement Statements signed by each user. See Attachment A which may be adapted to include supplemental Agency policies.
- Refrain from requesting passwords for employees' or applicants' social media accounts.
- Promptly address users' posts or other electronic communications that violate state and agency policies.

General Provisions	Application
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Serve as a role model to agency employees and other approved users specific to the use of social media. Communicate the right to monitor all aspects of electronic communications and social media usage. Such monitoring may occur at any time, without notice and without the user’s permission. • Ensure the retention of all electronic communications subject to and available for public distribution via the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) and the retention requirements established by the Library of Virginia. • Address violations of this policy using DHRM Policy 1.60 Standards of Conduct or the appropriate disciplinary policy or procedures for users not covered by the Virginia Personnel Act. Disciplinary actions up to and including terminations will be determined on a case-by-case basis contingent with the facts and the severity of the offense.
<p>Prohibited Activities</p>	<p>Certain activities are prohibited when using the Commonwealth’s Internet and electronic communications media or when using social media related to work or business operations. Employees engaging in prohibited activities may be subject to disciplinary action according to DHRM Policy 1.60, Standards of Conduct. Other users may be denied continued access.</p> <p>Prohibited activities include but are not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any use that violates applicable local, state, or federal law. • Accessing, uploading, downloading, transmitting, printing, posting, or storing information with sexually explicit content as prohibited by law (see Code of Virginia §2.2-2827). • Accessing, uploading, downloading, transmitting, printing, posting, or storing fraudulent, threatening, obscene, intimidating, defamatory, harassing, discriminatory, or otherwise unlawful messages or images. • Installing or downloading computer software, programs, or executable files contrary to the Virginia Information Technology Agency’s (VITA) Information Security Policy, Standards and Guidelines. • Users shall not download or use TikTok or WeChat applications or any other applications developed by ByteDance Limited or Tencent Holding Limited, or visit the TikTok or WeChat website on any state-government issued devices, including state-issued cell phones, laptops, or other devices capable of connecting to the internet except for public safety purposes. • No person shall access TikTok, WeChat or any other application developed by ByteDance Limited or Tencent Holdings Limited through Commonwealth owned, operated, or maintained wireless network.

General Provisions	Application
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accessing, uploading, downloading, transmitting, printing, communicating, or posting access-restricted agency information, proprietary agency information, sensitive state data or records, or copyrighted materials. • Using proprietary agency information, state data or records to include customer data, and social media to locate/contact agency customers for personal reasons. • Posting information or sending electronic communications using another's identity. • Permitting a non-approved user to access agency equipment. • Using agency or organization logos without written consent. Texting, emailing, or using hand-held electronic communications devices while operating a state vehicle according to the Office of Fleet Management Services Policies and Procedures Manual. • Accessing prohibited or sensitive/secured information without agency authorization.

AGENCY RESPONSIBILITIES AND REQUIREMENTS

Monitor Usage	<p>Agencies have a right to monitor all aspects of electronic communications and social media usage.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No user shall have any expectation of privacy in any message, file, image, or data created, sent, retrieved, received, or posted in the use of the Commonwealth's equipment and/or access. • Monitoring may occur at any time, without notice and without the user's permission. • Electronic records may be subject to the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) and therefore available for public distribution.
Communication	<p>Agencies are responsible for ensuring that employees have access to, read, understand, and acknowledge this policy and any related policies. Agency responsibilities include but are not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicating this policy and respective agency policy to current and new users including users transferred from other agencies. • Retaining electronic records in accordance with the retention requirements of the Library of Virginia. • Requiring and retaining acknowledgement statements, signed by each user to acknowledge receipt of the policy and agency policy, as applicable. Attachment A may be used or modified to accommodate agency business needs. This should be required prior to granting access to the agency's electronic communications and social media.
Supplemental Agency Policy	<p>Agencies may develop a written policy, consistent with this policy which supplements or clarifies specific issues for the agency.</p>

General Provisions	Application
<p>Address Violations</p>	<p>Agencies must address violations of this policy in accordance with Policy 1.60, Standards of Conduct. Appropriate disciplinary actions must be administered for users not covered by the Virginia Personnel Act. The appropriate level of disciplinary action will be determined on a case-by-case basis by the agency head or designee, with sanctions up to or including termination depending on the severity of the offense, consistent with Policy 1.60 or the appropriate applicable policy.</p>
<p>Access to Personal Social Media Accounts for Prospective and Current Employees</p>	<p>In accordance with de Code of Virginia § 40.1-28.7:5, agencies shall not require a current or a prospective employee to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disclose the username and password to the current or prospective employee's social media account; or • Require the current or prospective employee to add an employee, supervisor, or other administrator to the list of contacts associated with the individual's social media account. • If an Agency inadvertently receives an employee's username and password to, or other login information associated with, an employee's social media account(s) through the use of an electronic device provided to the employee by the employer or a program that monitors an employer's network, the employer shall not be liable for having the information but shall not use the information to gain access to an employee's social media account. <p>Agencies shall not:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take adverse action or threaten to discharge, discipline, or otherwise penalize a current employee for exercising his rights under this section; or • Fail or refuse to hire a prospective employee for exercising his rights under this section. <p>This section does not prohibit an agency from:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Viewing information about a current or prospective employee that is publicly available. • Complying with the requirements of federal, state, or local laws, rules or regulation or the rules of self-regulatory organizations; or • Accessing an employee's personal social media account login and password if the employee's social media account activity is reasonably believed to be relevant to a formal investigation or related proceeding conducted by the agency specific to allegations of an employee's violation of federal, state, local laws, or regulations or of Commonwealth or agency policies. If an agency exercises this right, the employee's username and password shall only be used for the purpose of the formal investigation or a related proceeding.

GLOSSARY:

Application or App	Software that is installed on a computer or a mobile device usually downloaded through specialized “app stores.”
Blog	A contraction of “web log” that is a website or part of a website with commentary, descriptions of events, or journal-type entries typically including the option for readers to reply and post comments.
Computer Network	Inter-connected computing devices that can share resources and communicate data electronically.
Electronic Communication Tools	Tools used as a means of sending and receiving messages or information electronically through connected electronic systems, devices, or the Internet. Tools may include but are not limited to networked computers, email, voicemail, cell phones, smart phones or other hand-held devices and new technologies as they are developed.
Internet	An international network of independent computer systems. The World Wide Web is one of the most recognized means of using the internet but may also include web or cloud-based applications.
Microblog	A form of a blog in which frequent, short updates are posted about specific activities (e.g., Twitter)
Photo Sharing	The online publishing of photographs with the ability to transfer and share the photos with others.
Podcast	Digital media file that can be downloaded for playback to computers and personal digital devices.
Social Media	Online communication or publication that allows for multi- directional interaction. Social media may include blogs, wikis, podcasts, social networks, photograph and video hosting websites, crowdsourcing, and new technologies as they evolve.
Social Networking	Virtual interactions with a group of people.
Users	All employees of the Commonwealth who use the Commonwealth’s Internet access and/or electronic communications media or external electronic communications media to communicate about the Commonwealth’s activities. NOTE: Agencies must also require consultants, contract personnel, or other non-employees such as volunteers or interns to abide by this policy.
Video Networking	The online publishing of videos with the ability to transfer and share them with others.
Wikis	A collaborative website that allows users to edit posted materials and information and to create collaborative solutions for identified topics.