Washington State Senate
Social Media Policy

Statement of Intent

The Senate recognizes that more and more frequently members of the public are turning to social media for news and information. In order to better serve the public and maximize civic engagement, the Senate should encourage its members to have a more robust presence on social media while adhering to Senate rules and decorum as well the Senate values of transparency and respectful deliberation.

Authorized Social Media Accounts

Subject to the approval of the Secretary of the Senate, each caucus and member of the Senate may authorize the creation and maintenance of official social media accounts for the purpose of engaging, updating, and educating the public with information directly relevant to the process, activities, issues, and/or business of the Washington State Legislature.

Recognizing the constant evolution of digital media landscapes, it is the intent of the Senate to accommodate the use of social media platforms as they exist and emerge. Requests for legacy platforms (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram) may be approved with limited review from the Secretary. Requests to create official Senate social media accounts for new platforms will be subject to additional review by the Secretary, including consultation with caucus staff.

Each caucus may maintain up to two accounts for each authorized social media platform and each member is limited to one account per platform. Each individual account must be authorized by the Secretary. The official social networking accounts will be managed by caucus communications staff. If, in the determination of the Secretary, an account is being mismanaged through excessive policy violations or failure to immediately correct policy violations, the Secretary may revoke authorization for the account.

The Secretary shall provide to each caucus annual documentation of all existing approved social media accounts and may provide updated lists upon request.

Responsible Parties

Subject to approval by the caucus chiefs of staff, the caucus communications directors will decide which staff members may access and update Senate social media accounts. Designated caucus staff members must have full administrator access for each account. Those administrators must have the ability to add or remove administrators, override passwords, and suspend, unpublish, and delete accounts. These staff members, along with their respective caucus leaders, will be responsible for the content of any caucus social media posts.
Assigned communications staff members will serve as the primary administrators and moderators for individual member accounts. Subject to the approval of individual members, additional access may be granted to other office staff (Legislative Assistants, Session Aides) in non-publishing or administrative capacities, including but limited to: managing account inboxes, drafting account posts, and monitoring account activity.

Members or their designees may post to their legislative social media accounts but must adhere to Senate rules and decorum and are encouraged to consult with their communications staff prior to posting to their accounts. All parties granted access to any official Senate social media account must provide a signed copy of the Senate Social Media Policy and have received the required Senate ethics training.

**Account Creation, Engagement & Moderation**

All official Senate social media accounts must make clear to the public in the title and applicable descriptions that the page is owned, operated, and moderated by the Senate Caucuses as an official government account. Individual member pages must include in account titles a clear variation of “Washington State Senator [Name]” or “Sen. [Name]” with all primary profile pictures using an identifiable official Senate photograph.

Comments, tagging, sharing, and other forms of account engagement are permitted provided that such engagement complies with existing ethics standards and the professional decorum expected by the Senate. Official accounts cannot be listed in any social media space as the host or participant on any campaign-related pages or events. It is the responsibility of designated account moderators to proactively remove instances of such engagement. For social media platforms that provide the ability for accounts to approve any tagging or sharing of official accounts or posts, this feature must be enabled.

Incoming members may make a one-time transfer of followers from campaign pages when creating new official accounts, if this feature is made available by the platform. Thereafter, the campaign page may not be used.

Senate social media accounts may engage with stakeholder, advocacy, or constituent accounts with legislatively relevant information so long as such engagement contains nothing supporting or opposing a candidate or ballot measure. Legislatively relevant information means: the text of documents including comment and commentary on (i) Bills and amendments, memorials and resolutions introduced in the legislature, (ii) Information related to specific public policy issues under consideration in the legislature, (iii) Research publications and “issue research,” as long as the publication contains relevant information on public policy issues before the legislature.

Additional posting intended to engender good will [e.g. recognizing holidays or supporting local sport] or inform constituents with community information is permitted.
All official accounts must include in provided spaces the following comments policy:

- The Senate reserves the right to remove any posts which are unrelated to legislative discourse, or which are defamatory, obscene, personally abusive or threatening, or which incite lawless action or illegal conduct.

- Ethics laws prohibit the use of any legislative resource to support or oppose any candidate or ballot measure. Posts related to election campaigns will be removed.

- Comments are not open to the promotion or advertisement of a business or commercial transaction or charitable solicitation. Such comments will be removed.

- Comments posted to this page are publicly accessible. Comments containing sensitive personal information, such as social security numbers, phone numbers, home addresses are prohibited and will be removed.

- This site does not and cannot provide legal advice. In order to understand your rights under the law, and how those rights are affected by your particular factual situation, you must consult with an attorney.

- Comments posted to social media pages in no way constitute legal service of any demand, legal notice or official communication to the Senate or any official or employee for any purpose.

- This comment policy is subject to amendment or modification at any time to ensure its continued use is consistent with state ethics laws, Senate rules, and its intended purpose as a limited forum.

- Comments complying with the above standards will not be edited or altered by Senate accounts.

**Promoted Posts and Advertising**

The use of communications funds for the purpose of promoting, advertising, and/or boosting social media posts is authorized. To the extent possible, parameters for such purchases must be used to target individuals within the district of a member. Caucus pages may purchase for a statewide audience.

No posts may be promoted on behalf of a member during the period beginning on December 1 of the year before a general election for his or her office and continuing through certification after the general election. The same restriction applies to a member who is a “candidate” for any public office as defined in RCW 42.17A.005.

**Election Year Freeze**
No social media posts are permitted to caucus social media sites if the content directly or indirectly promotes or opposes a ballot measure or candidate, consistent with the Senate’s election year activity restrictions. For a Senator who is under election year activity restrictions and member webpage restrictions, no social media posts may be made to his or her Senate social media sites beginning on the first day of the declaration of candidacy filing period specified in RCW 29A.24.050, except during a special legislative session. If possible, official social media accounts for members will be temporarily disabled or made inactive during this period.

Archiving

Temporary posting features on any social media platform (e.g. Instagram or Facebook “Stories”) must be saved and accessible for review. If the ability to save or recall temporary posts is unavailable, use of such features is prohibited.

All official Senate social media accounts will be archived in accordance with RCW 42.56 by the Secretary of the Senate.

Policy Enforcement & Review

Immediate contact should be made with Caucus Communications Directors for requests to remove or amend any posts or content violating the Senate Social Media Policy. In the instance of dispute without informal resolution, the Secretary of the Senate will be notified for final determination.

The Senate Social Media Policy is subject to review and amendment at any time by the Senate Facilities & Operations Committee. The policy should be considered by F&O at least once per biennium.