



## Creating a social media policy for your sports organization



When viaSport conducted a comprehensive survey of the sports sector, we soon discovered that creating a social media policy was one of the top challenges that sports organizations faced online. In fact, though 94% of sports organizations use social media, only 28% have a social media policy. Why? Many organizations said that they felt they lacked the expertise necessary to craft a policy that will be effective in the ever-changing social media landscape.


After all, the bulk of policy writing within sports organizations often falls to the Executive Director or the Board of Directors, many of whom might not be active on social media. Some higher-ups may even view social media as a communications minefield where one errant post or tweet could ignite a firestorm of controversy. Too often, the task of creating a social media policy feels overwhelming, so it's never done. If it *is* done, the policy is often highly prescriptive and too focused on avoiding crises, making members afraid to be creative or take a risk.

When done well, however, a social media policy can save you time and effort by ensuring that all of your members are on message and have clear roles in your social media strategy. A good social media policy also works with your [social media plan](#) to focus your online efforts and ensure that you have a coherent, [engaging social media online voice](#).

### What you will find in Module 16:

- [What is a social media policy?](#)
  1. [Who?](#)
  2. [Why?](#)
  3. [What?](#)
  4. [How?](#)
- [Putting it all together](#)

## What is a social media policy?

 A social media policy is a document that governs your organization's interactions online and sets out guidelines for conduct. One of the challenges of creating a social media policy how-to guide is that the best social media policies are unique to the organizations that create them. Some organizations require a simple one-page list of guidelines, others need a complex document reviewed by many lawyers. The one-size-fits-all approach simply won't work here.

### Here, are seven features of a good social media policy.

1. **Focus on the positive:** Instead of trying to prevent a crisis or gaffe, good social media policies focus on building a thriving, successful social media presence by giving members the

tools to make good decisions and represent their organization in the best light.

2. **Reflect your organization's mission and values:** Your organization's mission and values should be at the heart of everything you do, including social media. Make sure your social media policy reflects your organization's culture. If, for example, your organization values diversity, you'll want to ensure that many voices are heard on your social media channels.
  3. **Value education over discipline:** By educating members on social media instead of waiting for mistakes to happen, you can prevent problems before they start.
  4. **Display trust:** As Beth Kanter says, "Trust is cheaper than control." It's likely that your members are already making good decisions online, so your social media policy should simply empower them to navigate the social media landscape rather than try to control their behaviour.
  5. **Have clear goals:** Before you make a policy, you need to know what you hope to achieve with it. That's why some social media experts recommend not crafting a social media policy until you've used social media for long enough to understand the "risks and opportunities" of the medium.
1. **Be flexible:** Your social media policy should adapt to your successes and challenges online and be broad enough that it can apply to the changing world of social media. Most experts recommend updating your social media policy every six months.
  2. **Integrate across other mediums:** Your social media policy should work with your other policies, your [communications network](#), and your [social media action plan](#).

So how do you craft a social media policy that displays these features? The format and amount of detail is really up to you. We've assembled a list of questions to serve as a springboard for your discussion and recommend brainstorming through this list with your key stakeholders, then using the feedback to craft a policy that meets your organization's needs. If this list feels exhaustive, don't worry: simply focus on the questions most relevant to your organization.

## Who

Social media is all about engagement and interaction. In short: it's all about the people. Before you can create a social media policy, you need to assemble a team of stakeholders and decide who will use your policy.


*Ask yourselves the following questions:*

- What stakeholders should help us craft our social media policy?
- Who will follow the policy? Staff? Athletes? Coaches? Volunteers? All members?
- What role will each stakeholder play in executing our social media policy?
- Clearly identify what role each person will play to avoid overlap and confusion. For example, Bob might update the Facebook page. Lisa might tweet at tournaments. Your Executive

Director might approve content.

- What roles will volunteers and non-paid members play? It's easier to regulate the behaviour of your staff than that of your volunteers. Do you need a separate policy for volunteers? For athletes?
- How often will your social media team meet to evaluate its progress?


## Why

 Before you can come up with a policy, you need to know why you're creating the policy in the first place.

*Ask your stakeholders:*

- Look at your mission statement and come up with your organization's values. How should these values factor into your social media policy?
- What are your social media goals?
- What behaviours would you like to promote?
- What behaviours would you like to deter?
- Describe your organization's culture. How does your social media play into this culture?
- Do you have an organizational voice? If not, work through our [Organizational Voice Module](#) to craft one.
- Research shows that social media culture values "transparency, consistency, connection, creativity and promptness." How will you incorporate these values into your policy?

## What

 Your social media policy should help your stakeholders know what content and behaviours have a place on social media.

*Ask your stakeholders:*

- What content should never be posted?
- What content should gain approval from an Executive Director or the board before being posted?
- Have you ever actually had a social media problem or controversy arise? If so, what was the root cause of this issue and what steps did you take to remedy it?

- What boundaries would you like your staff to draw between their personal lives and their professional lives online? For example, can they complain about work on their personal Facebook page? Is it okay to share staff personal news like weddings or birthdays on social media?
- What image would you like to project online?
- What risks do you face on social media? Do you have any unique legal factors or privacy concerns?
- What is your privacy policy? How does this impact your social media presence?
- Does your organization serve any vulnerable populations? How do they factor into your social media policy?
- Do you need to update any waivers to provide you with social media permissions?
- Do you have any taboo subjects that should not be addressed on social media?
- What are your rules around copyright and fair use?

## How



Now it's time to get into the nitty gritty of your policy and add some action items to the principles you've outlined.

*Ask your stakeholders:*

- How will you respond to negative comments? When will you delete comments? When will you take the conversation offline?
- When will you ban someone?
- What steps should a member take to get potentially controversial content approved?
- Who is the point of contact for questions on social media?
- How often will you review your social media policy?
- What happens when you make a mistake online? How will you address it?
- How will you handle constructive criticism?
- How will you hold your members accountable to your policy?
- How will you educate your members about social media to ensure they have the tools to follow your policy?
- If someone breaches your social media policy, what process will occur? Who is in charge of

this?

- Will you copyright your content or use a Creative Commons license that allows others to use your content?
- Will you monitor employee social media use? If yes, how will you do so?
- Who owns your social media properties? You want to be clear that you own your social media channels so that a staff member does not leave the organization and take your Facebook page with them.
- How will you evaluate your success and learn from your failures?
- How often will you evaluate your social media policy and update it? Who is in charge of this process?
- Do you need a lawyer to review this policy? (Note: most social media experts recommend having a lawyer look at your policy).
- Is anything in your policy potentially unenforceable?

## Putting it all together



Now it's time to take the results of your brainstorming and craft a social media policy.

The format that your social media policy takes will vary from organization to organization, but there are several good sites online with loads of templates and examples, including:

- <http://socialmediagovernance.com/policies/>
- <http://socialmedia.biz/social-media-policies/>

Remember that while your social media policy should fit your needs, many social media policies contain the following elements:

- mission statement;
- style guide (a set of writing guidelines that help to ensure uniformity);
- social media goals;
- roles and responsibilities;
- appropriate actions (guidelines about handling specific situations or circumstances); and
- best practices.

Do you have a social media policy that works for your organization? Have a question that wasn't tackled in this guide? Email [arley@bcwheelchairsports.com](mailto:arley@bcwheelchairsports.com) or tweet @Viasport\_ to get into the

conversation.

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## Sources

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To learn more, check out our Social Media Toolkit, found [here](#).



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Click this button to download the toolkit as a PDF:

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### Source URL:

<https://www.viasport.ca/social-media-toolkit/Creating-a-social-media-policy-for-your-sports-organization>