****

**Governance Code for Sport**

**Social Media**

Guidance Notes and Checklist

Disclaimer

Sport Ireland is making available a range of resources including guidance notes, policy documents and templates for selected areas aligned to the Governance Code for Sport which will support sport organisations, boards, management and staff in the development of relevant governance processes and procedures particular to their own organisation.

For the avoidance of doubt, the final decision on the nature, type, extent and format of approved governance policies, procedures and processes for each organisation is a matter for the board / highest governing structure of the organisation and the resources and material provided may assist the approval process.

This document is not, nor is it intended to be, a definitive statement of the law and it does not constitute legal advice.

This document is not a substitute for professional advice from an appropriately qualified source and it is recommended that sport organisations consult their governing document or obtain their own independent legal advice where necessary. Sport Ireland does not accept any responsibility or liability for any errors, inaccuracies or omissions in this document.

**Why an organisation needs a social media policy**

A social media policy outlines how an organisation and its employees should conduct themselves via the web, and all online media channels. A social media policy is an element of a business code of conduct, letting people in the organisation know how to act on social media and online.

Four of the five principles of the Code have sub-principles that make it important to have a clear and transparent social media policy.   Communicating with stakeholders and protecting the reputation of the organisation are both basic principles of good governance, and ones that are underpinned through the correct use of social media.

Principle 1 (Leading our organisation), speaks of ‘Managing, supporting and holding to account staff, volunteers and all who act on behalf of the organisation’, while principle 3 (Being Transparent and Accountable) speaks of ‘making sure there is regular and effective communication with (our stakeholders) about our organisation. Principle 4 (Working Effectively) speaks of ‘Making sure that our .. staff and volunteers understand their role and legal duties’ while principle 5 (Behaving With Integrity) speaks of ‘Protecting and promoting our organisation's reputation’.

A good social media policy will set out what online behaviours staff and volunteers are expected to conform to, as well as setting out intention and plans around effective communication with stakeholders. A good social media policy helps protect the organisation’s online reputation and encourages volunteers and employees to also get involved in sharing about the organisation in their online networks.

Whose responsibility is it to develop a social media policy?

It is the responsibility of the Board to ensure that all the principles of the Code are being upheld and delivered. The executive lead / Chief Executive Officer (CEO) is tasked with ensuring that the principles of the Code are being implemented in the organisation and thus will be responsible for ensuring a social media policy is written and being used internally. In an organisation with a HR manager, they will likely ensure that there is a social media policy, along with other HR policies, or it could be the responsibility of the Communications Manager. In a volunteer led organisation there may be a volunteer with specific expertise in the area e.g. a PRO (Public Relations Officer), who will write the policy/guidelines.

What does social media include?

Social media is any digital tool that allows users to quickly create and share content with the public. Social media encompasses a wide range of websites and apps. Some, like Twitter, specialize in sharing links and short written messages. Others, like Instagram and TikTok, are built to optimize the sharing of photos and videos. There is an ever-expanding range of social media types including:

* Social networks e.g., Facebook, Linkedin
* Bookmarking sites e.g., Pinterest
* Social news sites e.g., Reddit
* Media sharing e.g., YouTube
* Microblogging e.g., Twitter
* Blog and online forums e.g., Boards.ie

All need to be considered in a social media policy and the area should be monitored and updated regularly, as with all communications it is an ever changing and developing area.

What to include in a social media policy?

By creating a social media policy, your staff and volunteers will be aware of the organisation’s boundaries and expectations. It also helps staff and volunteers draw a line between their private lives and their involvement in the organisation.

**The following are elements that can be included in a social media policy:**

* A definition and purpose of policy: outline what the policy is about and who it applies to, including those managing the organisation’s social media accounts and those who use social media in a personal capacity (but are perceived as connected to the organisation e.g. athletes or administrators or referees)
* The roles and responsibilities: who will oversee social media activity and take overall responsibility for the day-to-day administration of the different activities?
* Comments on the use of organisation-related social media: what the limitations are as to what can be discussed, commented on or promoted via social media, to avoid potential problems or reputational damage
* Comments on the personal use of social media: description of what is seen as acceptable personal use
* General rules for using social media: including examples of inappropriate content and terms of use
* Expectations around the conduct of staff and board members on social media
* Information on monitoring: the organisation must ensure that any monitoring of the use of social media is carried out in compliance with relevant legislation
* References to other relevant policies or procedures: e.g., disciplinary procedure or anti-bullying procedure.
* Policy regarding sanctions: where it is believed that a volunteer has failed to comply with the policy, they will face the organisation’s disciplinary procedure.
* Ongoing review and update: provide details of who will be responsible for reviewing the policy and when this will be done
* Adherence to national laws and privacy guidelines

Implementing a social media policy: how and when to use it

New staff and volunteers should be made aware of all policies during the induction process, including the social media policy, and this should also be included in the employee handbook, and any introductory documentation given to volunteers. Some organisations may choose to publish their social media policy on their website. The social media policy should be regularly refreshed – the Code states that policies must be reviewed every 3 years – organisations may choose to review their social media policy more regularly than that given that it is an area that is in constant development. Training in social media could also be considered, and a proactive approach given to how reputation can be enhanced and developed, and how to cultivate positive relationships with stakeholders through effective online communications.

Further links and resources

[Irish Small and Medium Enterprises Association](Irish%20Small%20and%20Medium%20Enterprises%20Association)