

# Corporate Policy and Procedure

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Policy	<b>Social media governance</b>
Category	Corporate
Authority	Strategic Communications and Community Engagement
Related Policies	Media Relations Policy Good Service Standards Code of Conduct Policy Mobile Device Usage Policy Responsible Computing Policy
Approved By	Lisa Duarte, General Manager SCCE
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## Policy Statement

The City recognizes digital communications as a powerful way of sharing information, listening, engaging others, collaborating, and providing customer service, and that City social media channels are public forums. A strategic and transparent approach to social media management and moderation is crucial to building a respectful, inclusive, and safe online community.

The City of Guelph values online conversations and welcomes the opportunity to build relationships with community groups, residents, immigrants, visitors, businesses, potential investors, and other people interested in or impacted by the City's work; these relationships help Guelph achieve its organizational and community goals.

The City also expects some level of criticism and recognizes the value different perspectives can offer. Online feedback creates an opportunity to listen and respond to public opinion or correct misinformation and disinformation if and where it exists. The City invites users to post, share, discuss and debate on its social media channels while treating each other, City employees, and elected officials with respect in accordance with the commenting guidelines. Individuals that post content (including comments) that do not meet the City's social media commenting guidelines may be muted, blocked, or banned.

## Purpose

This policy outlines how the City will manage content posted on and to its social media accounts and channels including why, when, and how the City deletes content (its own or a user's) and/or mutes or blocks users from some or all its social media channels. It also sets out the process for users to request their access to the City's social media channels be reinstated.

## Definitions

**Administrator:** staff assigned to manage one or more social accounts or channels on behalf of the City; the administrator posts content, nurtures relationships among fans or followers, and moderates comments in line with the City's social media commenting guidelines. Administrators can hide or delete comments and mute, block, or ban users.

**Ban:** restricts a user from posting to, reacting to, or messaging a social account or channel; they can still see and share public content and @ mention the account in their own posts.

**Block:** restricts a user from contacting an account.

**Comment:** a form of engagement in which a user replies to a social media post or other user's comment.

**Delete:** erasing a comment from a post; this removes the comment for all users, including the owner. Users are not notified that the comment has been deleted but may, by looking, see that it has been removed.

**Hide:** blocking the community from seeing a comment except for the author and their connections.

**Mute:** removing a user's content from being seen in a feed by social administrators and others; the muted user can still see channel content and interact, but it will not be visible to the account/channel owner or other fans/followers.

**Owner:** the entity that has ownership, control and policymaking authority over the use of its social media accounts, channels and content. In this policy, owner means the City of Guelph.

**Post:** any content (e.g., text, links, photo, video) shared on a social channel; synonymous with Tweet.

**Profile:** the username or account under which a user posts content on or to social media channels; it is the profile against which the City acts regardless of whether the profile is managed by one or multiple users.

**Tweet:** see **Post**

**User:** an individual (under one or more usernames regardless of whether they post in their own name, a pseudonym, or on behalf of a business or organization) posting to, sharing with, discussing, or debating on a City-managed social media channel (does not include City staff who are posting, sharing, discussing, or debating in an official capacity; see **Administrator**).

## Scope

This policy is limited to how the City will exercise its discretionary administrative powers over content posted to or on City social media channels. The City is not responsible for all social media content, particularly content posted to channels not managed by the City. Social media platforms also enforce their own terms of service which may override the City's discretion or the City's own rights over its accounts. If the City does not administer its social channels according to a platform's own terms of service, the City's accounts could be further limited or restricted by the platform itself.

This policy applies to any individual (e.g., City staff, elected official, vendor, contractor, or community member) engaging through social media channels managed by the City of Guelph.

## Guelph's social media model

The City uses a hub and spoke model to administer and manage its online and social media activities. Guelph.ca and the main City of Guelph social media accounts (@cityofguelph) are the hubs, and accounts associated with departmental programs and initiatives are the spokes.

## Roles and responsibilities

**Administrative access:** administrative access to social media accounts for the purpose of posting content to City channels and moderating or responding to comments is granted solely by Strategic Communications and Community Engagement (SCCE).

Employees needing administrative access to City social media accounts must sign the Social Media Staff Agreement and complete necessary training assigned by SCCE.

**Advertising:** administrators of City social media channels can advertise on the channel they have administrative permission for. Advertising on @cityofguelph channels must be placed by staff in SCCE unless administrator access is granted.

**Approvals:** administrators of City social media channels approve their own social media content. SCCE will periodically audit channels to ensure content is in line with the City's brand, style and tone.

**Crisis/emergency response:** SCCE is responsible for all City social media channels when responding to a crisis/emergency the City is managing. Where additional resources are needed, SCCE will leverage the support of approved administrators. Only approved messages by SCCE are to be posted during a crisis/emergency.

**Customer service:** all departments/staff with administrative access to City social media channels are responsible for responding to customer service inquiries on the channel(s) they manage. City staff in Customer Service and SCCE can assist when dealing with difficult or controversial/contentious interactions. (Also see **Posting, monitoring and listening.**)

**Passwords:** SCCE maintains a list of all City social media account passwords and manages administrative access to these accounts.

Passwords are updated periodically at the discretion of SCCE and when a staff member with administrative access leaves the organization (as informed by Information Technology). Administrators of any social media channel needing to reset a password must contact SCCE.

**Posting, monitoring, and listening** staff assigned as administrators of City social media channels are responsible for posting content, and monitoring and listening to conversations. Departments with approved City social media channels are responsible for determining which positions include social media administration duties and updating job descriptions and postings as needed. (Also see **Customer Service**.)

**Social media accounts:** SCCE is responsible for approving and creating new social media accounts in consultation with Information Technology.

**Social media management tools:** SCCE is responsible for researching and recommending corporate tools and resources to support social media administration in consultation with Information Technology and Customer Service.

**Social media training:** SCCE assigns and provides social media training to staff assigned to administer City social media channels.

## **Social media monitoring standard**

The City's social media administrators will respond to inquiries during regular business hours; Monday to Friday 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Administrators monitor social media accounts throughout the day and acknowledge or respond to questions within one business day.

## **Correcting and deleting City-issued posts**

The City may correct or delete content posted by its administrators as follows:

**Correction:** a correction will be made when the City wants to preserve the original post but address an error such as a misspelling, typo or copy edit, or incorrect, missing, or unclear information.

**Deletion:** a post will be deleted if the content should never have been posted in the first place, e.g., the content was posted accidentally or too early, isn't in line with the City's social media guidelines or corporate values, or the account was hacked.

## **Violations of the City's social media commenting guidelines**

The City's social media commenting guidelines are published on [guelph.ca](http://guelph.ca) and the City's social channels.

When a user posts a comment that violates these guidelines, an Administrator may hide or delete the content and/or educate the user and, if the user continues to violate guidelines, the City may, using a three-strike system, mute, block, or ban (dependent on the management tools of the social platform) the user's profile.

When possible, Administrators will give users an opportunity to remove or edit content that violates the guidelines. However, most content will be removed without notice to protect the City's online community from harm or misinformation.

## **Reinstating a blocked, muted or banned profile to allow interaction on City social channels**

The City will consider reinstating access for a profile to interact on City social channels upon written request from the user. The City will consider unmuting, unblocking or unbanning profiles after a minimum of six months and on the condition that the user agrees, in writing, to follow posted social media guidelines.

## **Violations by users of a previously muted, banned, or blocked profile**

Profiles that were reinstated after being muted, blocked or banned for which a user violates the terms agreed to as part of their reinstatement within 90 days of profile reinstatement will be permanently blocked.

## **Social media governance procedures for administrators**

### **Managing mistakes and missteps in content posted by the City**

When a mistake happens, it will be acknowledged on the same feed where the problem occurred and share what actions the City has taken in response. For example, "Earlier we accidentally published a post that has since been deleted. We're looking into how that happened and apologize for any confusion, concern and/or harm the post may have caused."

### **Grammar mistakes**

Straightforward grammar mistakes and typos can be corrected by simply correcting the post. If the social platform does not allow the post to be corrected, the post can be deleted and reposted provided it's caught right away (i.e., little time has passed since posting and there are no comments on the post). If there are comments already on the post, the Administrator will respond to the original post noting what the correction is.

### **Accidental shares, hacks, and inaccurate posts**

If a post is published too early, before being finalized (draft or placeholder post), or has information that's incorrect, Administrators will take a screenshot of the post for internal records and then delete it. The administrator will email the screenshot of the post to SCCE at [communications@guelph.ca](mailto:communications@guelph.ca) with an explanation of the error, any information about how it happened, and the action taken in response.

Administrators will acknowledge what happened on the same feed where the problem occurred and share what actions the City has taken in response.

- If something problematic has occurred because of the error (e.g., complaint, media coverage), administrators will contact their leader and SCCE to determine what follow-up or response is needed.
- If there's any question about who posted something, passwords should be updated and access to channels reviewed to ensure employees no longer with the organization have been removed as administrators; contact SCCE.
- Administrators will alert SCCE and Information Technology if a hack is suspected.

## **Posts that offend or perpetuate harm**

Despite best efforts, sometimes a post can cause unintended harm or offend a user, for example, because of a failure to appreciate word origins or other meanings to the language or image used. If someone identifies a post as harmful or offensive, the Administrator will review the content and, where warranted, acknowledge the offense, and apologize online before documenting the post (screenshot or photo), deleting it, and reissuing the information more appropriately. The administrator will email the screenshot of the deleted post to SCCE at [communications@guelph.ca](mailto:communications@guelph.ca) with an explanation of the error, any information about how it happened, and the action taken in response.

Administrators will acknowledge what happened on the same feed where the problem occurred and share what actions the City has taken in response. For example, "Earlier we published a post that wasn't in line with the City's commitment to inclusiveness. We've deleted the post and sincerely apologize for any harm the post caused. We're open to learning and committed to doing better. Thank you to the user who shared their feedback with us."

If something problematic has occurred because of the error (e.g., complaint, media coverage), administrators will contact their leader and SCCE to determine what follow-up or response is needed.

## **Managing violations of the City's social media commenting guidelines**

The following outlines the escalating steps administrators will take to manage violations of the City's social media commenting guidelines.

When a violation occurs, the administrator will contact SCCE before taking any action to determine if this is a first, second or third violation.

### **First violation**

1. The Administrator will take a photo or screenshot of the comment(s) showing the user's username/profile and date of the comment and email it to [communications@guelph.ca](mailto:communications@guelph.ca) along with information about the steps taken (comment hidden or deleted and any response provided).
2. Where the platform allows a comment to be hidden, the Administrator will respond to the user to advise them that their comment violates the City's posted [social media commenting guidelines](#) and provide a link to the guidelines.
3. Otherwise, the comment will be deleted. If the user asks about the deletion the Administrator should respond.

Response template (either scenario):

- We keep the City's social media channels a safe place for discussion free of [name violation e.g., language that is offensive to other users]. Comments that violate our social media commenting guidelines as posted at [guelph.ca/social](http://guelph.ca/social) will be hidden or removed. You're welcome to repost a comment following the guidelines to participate in this conversation.

- SCCE will document the violation and store the photos and emails related to the interaction in the department's files for a period of five (5) years from the end of the calendar year the record was created in.
- If the user of a profile with a documented first violation does not commit a second violation of the guidelines from the same profile within 90 days of the first violation, the City will consider the user's record clear, and any subsequent violation of the City's social media commenting guidelines will be treated as a first violation.

### **Second violation**

1. The Administrator will take a photo or screenshot of the comment(s) showing the user's username/profile and date of the comment and email it to communications@guelph.ca along with information about the steps taken (comment hidden or deleted and any response provided).
2. Where the platform allows a comment to be hidden, the Administrator will respond to the user to advise them that:
  - their comment violates the City's posted [social media commenting guidelines](#) and provide a link to the guidelines.
  - this is the second violation in 90 days and a third violation will result in muted, banned, or blocked without further notice.
  - Otherwise, the comment will be deleted. If the user asks about the deletion the Administrator should respond.
  - Response template (either scenario):
  - We keep the City's social media channels a safe place for discussion free of [name violation e.g., language that is offensive to other users]. Comments that violate our social media commenting guidelines as posted at [guelph.ca/social](#) will be hidden or removed. You're welcome to repost a comment following the guidelines to participate in this conversation.
  - SCCE will document the violation and store the photos and emails related to the interaction in the department's files for a period of at least five (5) years from the end of the calendar year the record was created in.
  - If a user of a profile with a documented second violation does not commit a third violation of the guidelines within 90 days of the second violation, the City will consider the user's record clear, and any subsequent violation of the City's social media commenting guidelines will be treated as a first violation.

### **Third violation**

1. The Administrator will take a photo or screenshot of the comment(s) showing the user's username/profile and date of the comment, email it to communications@guelph.ca and hide (where the platform allows) or delete the comment.
2. SCCE will review the user's violations to determine whether to mute, ban, or block the user as the platform allows. SCCE may consult other City departments (e.g., Legal or Customer Service) to inform them of the decision and then provide direction to the Administrator.

3. The Administrator will mute, block, or ban the user as the platform allows and as directed by SCCE.

4. SCCE will document the violation, note the action taken, and store the photos and emails related to the interaction in departmental files for a period of five (5) years from the end of the calendar year the record was created in.

### **Single user violations across multiple profiles**

Where an Administrator suspects that a user has created or is using one or more profiles to avoid regulation of violations of the City's social media guidelines, the Administrator will document any evidence available to them and contact SCCE to review the information and determine next steps.

### **Process for reinstating access to interact on City social channels**

1. After a minimum six (6) month period of being muted, blocked, or banned, a user can submit a request for reinstated access to interact on City social channels by emailing [communications@guelph.ca](mailto:communications@guelph.ca). The user must include the social channels and associated profiles they are requesting for reinstatement of.
2. SCCE will confirm whether the profile is currently muted, blocked, or banned from social channels.
3. Upon confirmation of the profile status, SCCE will respond to the user, provide the social media guidelines (by link or attachment) and ask them to:
  - review the social media commenting guidelines, and
  - agree (in writing via email) to follow the posted social media commenting guidelines.
4. Once the City has agreement from the individual to follow the City's social media commenting guidelines, the users profiles will be reinstated on applicable social media channels as requested by the user.
5. SCCE will document and save all communication with the user in departmental files and update the user's status in the records.
6. Documentation related to the user's violations and reinstatement will be stored for a period of five (5) years from the end of the calendar year the record was created in.

### **Social media posting and commenting guidelines**

The City invites people impacted by and interested in our work to post, share, discuss and debate the subjects of City posts on its social channels with the City and each other while treating each other with respect.

The City will not tolerate posts or comments that:

- are unrelated to City services, programs, or projects or to the subject of the post the comment was made on, or are unintelligible or irrelevant



- are targeted at an individual (including City staff or a representative of the City) or are profane (including inappropriate language), hateful or defamatory, insulting, rude, abusive, aggressive, or violent
- promote, foster, or perpetuate any form of discrimination
- contain content of a sexual nature or links to such content
- conduct or encourage illegal activity
- are aimed at soliciting business or for marketing purposes
- contain spam
- invade the privacy of others, e.g., share information about any identifiable individual including photographs of, information about, or views and opinions of that individual
- could compromise public safety, security, or City operations, including comments that contain misinformation or disinformation
- violate a legal ownership interest of any other party
- impersonate or misrepresent someone else, including public figures, City staff, or City officials
- do not add to the normal flow of conversation, dialogue, or debate

The City of Guelph is not responsible for any use of City content or materials by other users.

These guidelines are used in conjunction with the City of Guelph's Social Media Framework.

The above guidelines are posted on [guelph.ca](http://guelph.ca) as well as on each social media channel.

## **Related policies, guidelines, and information**

- [Social media guidelines for elected officials](#)
- [Social media commenting guidelines \(community\)](#)
- [Media Relations Policy](#)
- [Access and Privacy Policy](#)