

**NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION
OFFICE OF INFORMATION AND RESOURCE MANAGEMENT
ARLINGTON, VA 22230**

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ADMINISTRATION AND MANAGEMENT

SUBJECT: Policy for Social Media Use

1. Scope

This policy applies to all NSF employees, contractors, Intergovernmental Personnel Act (IPA) assignees, and Visiting Scientists, Engineers, and Educators (VSEEs). Hereafter, all personnel are called “employees.” This policy also applies to others who have access to NSF equipment, computing services, or communication systems.

2. Purpose

This document establishes policy for the use of social media and Web 2.0 tools by NSF employees in the course of their employment. This policy will evolve as new technologies and social media tools become available.

Employees are cautioned that social media broadcast messages universally, in a forum accessible by all; these media create new opportunities for interchange and also create new vulnerabilities. An employee’s freedom to utilize social media to conduct agency business brings a commensurate requirement that the employee utilize these media responsibly, mindful always that as a federal employee the employee occupies a position of public trust.

This policy builds upon longstanding NSF policies for appropriate use of information technology (IT) resources and ethical conduct while allowing NSF to utilize innovative technology to enhance the agency’s engagement with external communities.

3. Definition

“Social media” and “Web 2.0” are general terms that encompass emerging Web tools for online collaboration and information sharing. These tools include, but are not limited to, technologies such as blogs (e.g., Blogger, LiveJournal), wikis (e.g., Wikipedia), social networks (e.g., LinkedIn, Facebook), file sharing sites (e.g., Flickr, YouTube), microblogging tools (e.g., Twitter), social bookmarking and news sites (e.g., Digg, StumbleUpon), and virtual worlds (e.g., Second Life).

4. Policy

NSF employees are encouraged to use social media tools to enhance communication, collaboration, and information sharing in support of NSF's mission. Employees participating on the agency's behalf in social media are expected to exercise decorum and professionalism, and to comply with all relevant agency policies.

If accessing social media for personal purposes while at work, employees must comply with NSF's Personal Use Policy for NSF Technology and Communication Resources (<http://infoshare.nsf.gov/showFile/2989/ib0818.pdf>), and IT Rules of Behavior (http://inside.nsf.gov/oirm/cio/it_security/rules.jsp).

Employees who create, contribute to, or participate in social media on NSF's behalf must follow the directives outlined in Section 4.1. The social media best practices described in Section 4.2 are provided as guidance only.

4.1. Social Media Use on NSF's Behalf

When using social media on NSF's behalf, employees must comply with the following directives.

1. Know and comply with NSF's policies for acceptable use of IT resources and standards for ethical conduct. IT policies and other pertinent information can be accessed from the IT Security Policy Page on Inside NSF (http://www.inside.nsf.gov/oirm/cio/it_security/policies.jsp). General standards of employee conduct remain in effect as outlined in NSF Conflicts of Interest and Standards of Ethical Conduct (<http://www.nsf.gov/pubs/manuals/manual15.pdf>). If you are unclear about these policies and standards, discuss them with your supervisor or consult with the Office of General Counsel (OGC).
2. Be transparent and authentic. Identify yourself: use your name and identify your position at NSF. Write in the first person and be clear that you are speaking on behalf of NSF.
3. Assume your communications are in the public domain, and thus are available for publishing or discussion in all forms of media. Remember that while you are responsible for the content you publish, NSF may also be held accountable for the content you publish. If you are unsure whether content you wish to publish is appropriate, it is your responsibility to discuss your concerns with your supervisor, the Office of Legislative and Public Affairs (OLPA), and/or OGC.
4. Know and comply with NSF policy on protecting the privacy of sensitive information (<http://infoshare.nsf.gov/showFile/2827/ib0810.pdf>). Do not post information about program announcements that have not yet been cleared; pending or unfunded proposals; merit reviews; personally identifiable information; or other sensitive data.

5. Respect your audience and colleagues. Do not engage in conduct that is not acceptable in a public setting, such as negative personal comments, obscenity, defamatory or harassing behavior, or other activities that could discredit or harm NSF's reputation.
6. Respect copyright, fair use, and financial disclosure laws. Exercise vigilance when posting ideas, concepts, or content to which an individual might claim ownership; rightful attribution is a keystone of responsible use of social media. You must secure explicit permission from the owner/creator of an image or video prior to posting.

4.2. General Social Media Best Practices

While NSF does not govern your use of social media beyond the scope of your employment, we encourage you to consider these best practices for general use.

1. When using social media, always be cognizant of your NSF responsibilities. By virtue of your position, you must consider whether personal thoughts you publish, even in clearly personal venues, may be misunderstood as expressing official NSF positions. Assume anyone can read what you write, including your colleagues.
2. Be aware of your NSF association in online social networks. If you identify yourself as an NSF employee or have a position for which your NSF association is known to the public, ensure that your profile(s) and all related content (even if they are of a personal nature) are (a) consistent with how you wish to present yourself as an NSF professional; (b) appropriate with the public trust associated with your position; and (c) in conformance with existing standards such as NSF's standards of ethical conduct.
3. Consider using a disclaimer. When you publish to a social media platform, be clear that what you say there represents your views and opinions, not the views and opinions of NSF. A disclaimer may state something like: "The postings on this site are my own and do not necessarily represent my employer's positions, strategies, or opinions."
4. Be mindful that social media content is widely accessible and persistent in the public domain. Exercise good judgment and consider content carefully before publishing.
5. Consider carefully when to use your NSF email address to register your account. If the purpose is primarily social, use a personal email address.
6. Understand what you're signing up for. When using a social media site for the first time, read the Terms of Service carefully so you are certain that you understand, and can adhere to, the rules governing a site's use.

5. Enforcement

Violation of this policy could result in disciplinary action up to and including removal and/or civil or criminal penalties, including personal financial liability for the cost of improper use.

Andrea T. Norris
Acting Chief Information Officer

Distribution: All Employees
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