

Boy Scouts of America Social Media Guidelines

[Note: It is not the goal of this document to provide a step-by-step “how to” on creating and using the specific features of social media channels. Such guides already exist and can be found elsewhere. Additionally, social media changes regularly, so this document reflects the current guidelines as determined by the BSA and is subject to modifications and amendments from time to time as required.]

INTRODUCTION

It's an exciting time to be part of the BSA for many reasons. One of those is that new communication vehicles now enable current and past Scouts and Scouters, as well those who are interested in participating or are just interested in Scouting in general, to communicate directly with each other about Scouting. Online social media tools such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube have made it possible for virtually anyone with an Internet connection to create and be part of online communities where people can discuss Scouting and share stories, photos, videos, and other types of media.

Although using social media is not a Scouting activity, their use to connect with others interested in Scouting can be a very positive experience. But the creation and maintenance of these channels requires forethought, care, and responsibility. For that reason, the Boy Scouts of America has developed the following guidelines to help you navigate the use of social media channels. These guidelines are a complement to the BSA's existing Youth Protection policies and training.

SOCIAL MEDIA AND YOUTH PROTECTION

First, everyone should review and strictly adhere to the terms of service and existing guidelines outlined by each individual social media channel (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, etc.). As is true for participation in Scouting activities, all Scouts and adult leaders should abide by the guidelines outlined in the Scout Oath and Law when participating in social networking. As with a Scouting activity, safety and Youth Protection should be a key focus. Staying true to the commitment of the BSA to be an advocate for youth and to keep children and their privacy safe, both online and off, should always be at the forefront of any considerations where social media usage is concerned.

To help ensure that all communication on social media channels remains positive and safe, these channels must be public, and all communication on or through them must be public. This enables administrators to monitor all communication and help ensure there is no inappropriate communication between adult leaders and Scouts or between Scouts themselves. Therefore, no private channels (e.g., private Facebook groups or invite-only YouTube channels) are acceptable in helping to administer the Scouting program. Private channels and private communication put both the youth and you at risk. If you feel the information you seek to share via social media channels should not be shared in public, you should not share that information via social media.

Abiding by the “two deep” leadership policy that governs all Scouting activities also applies to use of social media. Two-deep leadership means two registered adult leaders, or one registered leader and a parent of a participating Scout or other adult, one of whom must be 21 years of age or older, are required for all trips and outings.

As it relates to social media, two-deep leadership means there should be no private messages and no one-on-one direct contact through email, Facebook messages, Twitter direct messaging, chats, instant messaging (Google Messenger, AIM, etc.), or other similar messaging features provided through social media sites. All communication between adults and youth should take place in a public forum (e.g. the Facebook wall), or at a

bare minimum, electronic communication between adults and youth should always include one or more authorized adults openly “copied” (included) on the message or message thread.

While all communication should be public and leaders should follow the two-deep rule while communicating via social media channels, it is recommended that as you and members of your group create personal social media profiles, the personal information on these profiles should be kept private (e.g., do not display your phone number, address, or personal email address on these profiles). It is recommended that any Scouts with personal profiles for social media make those profiles private so the Scout’s personal information is not accessible by the public. In creating personal profiles, everyone should familiarize themselves with and abide by the terms of service of the sites where they create and maintain personal profiles.

INTERNET SAFETY GUIDELINES

Any Scout units that plan to use social media should share the following Internet safety guidelines with Scouts, parents, and leaders, and all Scouts should abide by the following Internet safety guidelines and personal protection rules:

- ▶ Keep online conversations with everyone in public places, not in email.
- ▶ Do not give anyone online your real last name, phone numbers at home or school, your parents’ workplaces, or the name or location of your school or home address unless you have your parents’ permission first. Never give your password to anyone but a parent or other adult in your family.
- ▶ If someone sends or shows you email or any type of direct message/wall post with sayings that make you feel uncomfortable, trust your instincts. You are probably right to be wary. Do not respond. Tell a parent or trusted adult what happened.
- ▶ If somebody tells you to keep what’s going on between the two of you secret, tell a parent or guardian.
- ▶ Be careful to whom you talk. Anyone who starts talking about subjects that make you feel uncomfortable is probably an adult posing as a kid.
- ▶ Pay attention if someone tells you things that don’t fit together. If one time an online “friend” says he or she is 12, and another time says he or she is 14. That is a warning that this person is lying and may be an adult posing as a kid.
- ▶ Unless you talk to a parent about it first, never talk to anybody by phone if you know that person only online. If someone asks you to call—even if it’s collect or a toll-free, 800 number—that’s a warning. That person can get your phone number this way, either from a phone bill or from caller ID.
- ▶ Never agree to meet someone you have met only online at any place off-line, in the real world.
- ▶ Watch out if someone online starts talking about hacking, or breaking into other people’s or companies’ computer systems; phreaking (the “ph” sounds like an “f”), the illegal use of long-distance services or cellular phones; or viruses (online programs that destroy or damage data when other people download these onto their computers).
- ▶ Promise your parent or an adult family member and yourself that you will honor any rules about how much time you are allowed to spend online and what you do and where you go while you are online.

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR SOCIAL MEDIA USE

For practical considerations, the BSA expects adults intending to use social media on behalf of Scouting to follow the following:

- ▶ Social media must be monitored. A qualified staff member or volunteer should have the responsibility of monitoring social media channels daily, and backup administrators/monitors should be designated so there is no gap in the monitoring.
- ▶ Integrate your communications. Create a strategy to surround your intended audience with your key message(s) through print, the Web, email, radio, TV, word of mouth, and social media.
- ▶ Talk to your audiences and let them talk to and about you. By posting content on a consistent schedule, you can tell your story and encourage conversations in the community.

- ▶ Social media takes a thick skin. Negative conversations are happening already, but now you have a voice in the conversation. Don't delete negative comments unless they violate the terms laid out in the BSA Social Media Digital Contract.
- ▶ Be prepared to respond to negative or inaccurate posts if response is warranted. Some negative comments do not require a response, while others should be taken seriously and addressed. Factors such as the number of followers and the severity of the conversations should temper if and how you respond.
- ▶ Direct media inquiries to the appropriate person. Media inquiries coming through social media should be referred to the Scout executive or a designee for an official response.
- ▶ Be Scout-like. When disagreeing with others' opinions, remain appropriate and polite. If you find yourself in a situation online that looks as if it's becoming antagonistic, do not get overly defensive and do not disengage from the conversation abruptly. Ask your Scout executive or the designee for advice on how to disengage from the dialogue in a polite manner that reflects well on the BSA.
- ▶ Build trust by being open and transparent. Share information and what the challenges and opportunities are for Scouting in your community.

KEY SOCIAL MEDIA CHANNELS AND CONSIDERATIONS FOR USE

There are many social media channels available to users, and new channels are being introduced frequently. As such, it would be impossible to provide information on all of them. We will focus on three of the most popular and most applicable to Scouting. Those channels are Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube.

Facebook

Facebook is a wonderful way to form online communities where groups of people can gather to have conversations and share information. Indeed, the BSA National Council as well as many local councils and even some units are already using Facebook to communicate about Scouting. Of course, creating and maintaining a Facebook page for your council or unit is a big responsibility and should not be entered into lightly.

It may be valuable to think of a Facebook page as a little like a troop meeting that is always open, always going on, and where members of the public may drop by and watch or participate at any time of day or night. That means Scouts and Scouters can be even more involved in sharing the fun and excitement of Scouting and be a more active part of the group discussion—even when they're at home. But it's also easy to see how, if left unstructured or unattended by Scout leaders, this never-ending meeting could easily become a problem.

When considering whether or not Facebook might be a good option for your council or unit, it is important to remember that Facebook requires all users to be at least 13 years of age. Before creating a Facebook page, you should educate yourself about what Facebook is and how it is used, and familiarize yourself with its terms of service. This will help you navigate carefully in your development of a fan page.

When creating a Facebook page, you should make it a public fan page. In addition, you should designate at least two administrators who have access to the login, password, and page management/monitoring information. This conforms to the two-deep leadership policies of the BSA. At least one of these page administrators should be a BSA employee, a local council employee, or registered volunteer who has taken Youth Protection training. All Youth Protection policies that govern the use of email are applicable to the use of the messaging capabilities of Facebook.

Perhaps the biggest strength of Facebook is also its biggest weakness: Facebook fan pages are open to the public, which means any information shared on that fan page can be viewed by essentially anyone. As such, you should make sure that any information shared on that page by you or by your fans is information that is appropriate to share with the public. This is especially true regarding the level of detail you provide regarding Scouts and their activities.

For the Info Tab of your Facebook page, you should use the guidelines set forth on the BSA National Council Facebook Info Tab in its Digital Contract, found here:
<http://www.facebook.com/BoyScoutsofAmerica#!/BoyScoutsofAmerica?sk=info>

Once you have created a Facebook fan page, invited people to “like” your page and started gathering “fans,” it is important for you to post good and appropriate content and monitor the content that is posted to your wall. Unfortunately, not all the content posted to the wall by your fans may be appropriate. All content posted by you or by fans on the Facebook wall should conform to the precepts of the Scout Oath and Law. Content that does not meet that standard should be removed immediately.

If a user posts highly offensive content, the content should be removed immediately, and you may need to block or ban the user who posted it. Such an action should not be used liberally but only when content is truly objectionable.

This type of careful monitoring requires vigilance. Before creating a Facebook page, you should consider whether you or someone else who will administer the page will be able to monitor that page and post content consistently to help ensure that only appropriate content is posted. Pages with inconsistent and infrequent updates can cause your fans to become disinterested, and your page can become a target for spammers or other predatory parties who recognize that you appear not to be actively involved on your page.

As with any online site, it is highly important that you do not give out personal information about Scouts or Scouters to anyone on Facebook. Every effort should be made to help ensure that your fans and those Scouts and Scouters that use the Facebook page are protected. Keeping Scouts safe and keeping their private information safe should be the primary concern in any endeavor involving them—whether that’s keeping them safe on a camping trip or keeping them safe on the unit Facebook fan page.

Twitter

Because of its 140-character-per-post limit and relative lack of multimedia capabilities, Twitter is designed for quick, simple updates and also can be used like instant messaging or email to have conversations with one or more people in a mostly public forum.

Twitter can be a great place to share quick observations, provide updates about programs, share training deadlines, link to other websites with event details, share great Scouting stories, and have an informal conversation with followers. In general, Twitter has a more personal voice, meaning posts on Twitter are expected to be relatively informal and friendly. It is also important to remember that Twitter is a public forum and is viewable by virtually anyone. That means content placed on Twitter should be acceptable to your specific intended audience of followers as well as a wider audience.

Some direct-messaging capabilities exist with Twitter; however, adults should not use these direct-messaging capabilities when dealing with Scouts. All Youth Protection policies that govern the use of email are applicable to the messaging capabilities of Twitter. Before starting a Twitter account for your council or unit, familiarize yourself with Twitter’s terms of service and adhere to those guidelines.

When creating a Twitter account for your unit or council, you should designate at least two administrators who have access to the login, password, and page management/monitoring information. This conforms to the two-deep leadership policies of the BSA. At least one of these page administrators should be a BSA employee, a local council employee, or registered volunteer who has taken Youth Protection training.

In addition, all content posted on your Twitter account should be in line with the Scout Oath and Law. That includes never “tweeting” (posting) content that is un-Scout-like or responding to a tweet in an un-Scout-like manner to anyone interacting with you through your Twitter account.

Twitter should be updated regularly and watched closely so responses can be provided to people requesting information or trying to start a conversation.

YouTube

YouTube is primarily a video-hosting and -viewing platform. It lets you upload videos to a channel you manage. Once on your YouTube channel, each video has an individual URL and can be viewed on YouTube or shared as a link or embedded (by you, your fans, and members of the public) via other social media outlets and on websites. Before starting a YouTube channel for your council or unit, familiarize yourself with the site's terms of service and adhere to those guidelines.

When creating a YouTube channel, your channel must be public. There should be no private groups. In addition, you should designate at least two administrators who have access to the login, password, and page management/monitoring information. This conforms to the two-deep leadership policies of the BSA. At least one of these page administrators should be a BSA employee, a local council employee, or registered volunteer who has taken Youth Protection training.

Like the other social media channels, the public at large has access to your videos and may view and comment on them unless you set viewing restrictions in your settings. If you enable comments, you should monitor those comments regularly to be sure they are appropriate. YouTube also has messaging features (similar to email). All Youth Protection policies that govern the use of email are applicable to the messaging capabilities of YouTube.

Having a YouTube channel is a great way to share videos of events, how-to videos, awards ceremony videos, and other videos that would be good to share with members of the group as well as the public.

An important consideration for YouTube or any similar site that features videos and/or images of Scouts is that all videos/images should adhere to recommended Youth Protection policies and should protect the privacy of individual Scouts. Additionally, all videos should show Scouts and leaders following designated appropriate guidelines and wearing proper attire for whatever activity is being undertaken in the video. All safety and Youth Protection policies must be followed for any Scouting activities, including those being captured on video.

Final Thoughts

It is important to remember that all social media channels are, by nature, designed to be social, that is, shared with members of the public. As such, whatever social media activities you engage in should be completed with the understanding that the public will see them and may engage in an online dialogue with you as a result. You should not do anything on a social media channel that reflects poorly on you, other individuals in your council or unit, the Boy Scouts of America, or anyone else. Before posting any content on any social media channel, you should first ask yourself if that content is in keeping with the precepts of the Scout Oath and Law.

As an additional consideration, once created, social media channels and the content on them "live forever" on the Internet, sometimes even if the accounts have been deleted. That means social media channels created today may still exist five, 10, or 15 years from now, in some cases long after those who started them are no longer involved directly with Scouting. As such, considerations should be made regarding the transitioning of administration rights and duties if and when the initial administrators end their direct involvement in Scouting.

Also, organizations wishing to use social media must accept the fact that listening is just as important as speaking in these channels, and those wishing to participate in this space should be prepared to listen if they are to reap any value.

Social media can be a powerful tool for sharing the joys and triumphs of Scouting, but if not executed properly, it can be a detriment to everything Scouting represents. As such, engage in social media activities wisely. Also realize that social media is a new and evolving form of communication that requires flexibility, patience, and

commitment, but the rewards of increased connection with, and understanding of, your target audience can be great.

In your social media communications, you should be clear that it is not an official BSA social media channel but is instead your own personal channel. You can use the following template as an example:

“This site is the personal [reference your specific social media channel] of [your name or organization] and is reflective only of my personal views, thoughts, and opinions. This site does not have the endorsement of the Boy Scouts of America, and it is not an official communication channel of the Boy Scouts of America.”

Should you have questions regarding any of the guidelines and/or recommendations or concerning the use of a specific social media channel not covered here, please feel free to contact the BSA National Council social media team at social.media@scouting.org for further guidance.