



Ausable Bayfield
Conservation Authority
(ABCA)

Social Media Policy

Approved by the ABCA Board of Directors
on October 15, 2020 to replace the
ABCA Online Social Media Policy dated December 16, 2010

**Doug Cook, Chair, ABCA Board
of Directors**

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and Secretary-Treasurer**

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SECTION ONE: PURPOSE

Ausable Bayfield Conservation Authority (ABCA) sees effective social media as an important two-way communications tool to help build a healthier watershed, as envisioned by the *Conservation Strategy* and the *Communications Plan*. Social media such as Facebook and Twitter have changed how many watershed residents get information and talk to each other – and with us. We need to use tools our clients and partners use so we can most effectively communicate – both providing information and listening. Social media allows Ausable Bayfield Conservation to foster closer personal relationships with volunteers, clients, stakeholders, and community partners, and to listen better to the people who can improve watershed health. These tools help us to share information and to hear their concerns, their questions, and the things they like, or don't like, about what we are doing. This two-way communication can show how program and service delivery can be changed to increase benefits and reduce barriers to adoption. No one method of communication will reach everyone but social media is an important tool in the communications tool box.

The ABCA Social Media Policy:

1. Helps achieve the mission and vision of Ausable Bayfield Conservation.
2. Engages our partners in protection of life and property and watershed resources and other conservation work to protect water, soil, and habitat for living things.
3. Builds and protects public trust in us and in our work.
4. Manages and reduces risk to the organization.
5. Recognizes the importance of social media as an effective and cost-effective tool for communicating to watershed stakeholders and community partners and as a way to receive feedback from them.

SECTION TWO: EXPECTATIONS

1. Directors, staff, and volunteers are to comply with all applicable policies.
2. Staff must abide by all ABCA corporate policies. Failure to do so may result in disciplinary action up to and including termination.
3. ABCA has worked hard to build its positive reputation in the community. This policy reinforces how directors and staff should maintain positive, professional conduct.
4. Staff should realize the opportunity to engage our partners and stakeholders through social media, but they should do so thoughtfully while protecting the organization's brand and reputation and reducing potential risk to ABCA.
5. ABCA programs and projects should include a social media component when possible.

SECTION THREE: HIGHEST STANDARD

1. If there is any conflict between this policy and any other approved ABCA policy, the policy with the highest level of protection for ABCA takes precedence.

SECTION FOUR: COMMUNICATIONS CHANNELS

1. Staff should balance social media use with other effective media and communication tools outlined in the *Communications Plan*. Social media should not replace email, websites, or other forms of public engagement.
2. Employees monitoring social media channels should refer clients to applicable staff if there are concerns or issues that need a fuller response than social media can provide.

SECTION FIVE: CREATION, EVALUATION OF SOCIAL MEDIA

1. Staff should evaluate the benefits of new social media tools as they emerge and evolve – and introduce new tools as advisable, as approved by managers, and as resources permit.
2. Staff are encouraged to use social media but to use it responsibly.
3. New social media platforms, sites, or channels should not be added without approval by Communications Specialist, under the supervision of the General Manager, to ensure sustainability of these vehicles and consistency of messaging to public.

SECTION SIX: ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

1. Management will appoint a staff member with communications expertise to act as moderator of social media pages and channels and to coordinate social media monitoring, posting, and replies.
2. The Communications Specialist, or alternate designated by management, fulfills this role under the supervision of the General Manager.
3. Other staff members, as directed by managers, are encouraged to create social media content in consultation with the Communications Specialist who should review posts prior to posting, whenever possible, to ensure messaging and style consistency, brand management, and to reduce potential risk to the organization.
4. If the communications specialist is absent, the General Manager should appoint an alternate staff person with communications expertise to monitor social media; review public posts/messages; and respond in as timely a manner as feasible if – in their professional judgment – a response is needed.

SECTION SEVEN: RESPONDING TO SOCIAL MEDIA MESSAGES AND POSTS

1. The Communications Specialist, or alternate, is to monitor social media and respond in as timely a manner as feasible if a response is needed. However, social media response times may vary and may not be as quick as responses to emails and phone calls so the public should be encouraged to phone or email staff for the most timely response.

Social media messaging is convenient for many of our community partners and an asset to promoting ABCA events, programs and services. However:

2. For all urgent inquiries – including, but not restricted to, planning or regulation inquiries and conservation lands and property-related inquiries – staff monitoring social media should direct members of the public to contact planning and regulations staff, or other staff depending on the inquiry, directly by phone or email.
3. For other inquiries staff should encourage and direct stakeholders to use email or phone to contact staff for timely responses, when appropriate.

SECTION EIGHT: TRAINING

1. ABCA staff should receive, and adhere to, ongoing training on social media policies that reduce risk to ABCA and on social media best practices that engage our community partners and stakeholders effectively and cost-effectively.

SECTION NINE: BRAND MANAGEMENT

1. Meet brand standards including the approved Ausable Bayfield Conservation logo/wordmark.

SECTION TEN: RULES OF USE

1. Social media channels should be administered with a user account that belongs to ABCA.
2. Staff should establish, share, and maintain rules of use for ABCA social media channels (pages, etc.) and follow the rules outlined by the social media platform.
3. Staff should include disclaimer(s) to inform people opinions expressed by users of our social media channels do not necessarily reflect the position of ABCA.

SECTION ELEVEN: IMAGE USE

1. Staff, and directors, should use images only for the purpose for which they were collected and should obtain appropriate permissions for images; and for images and names of individuals who may appear in online media content created by ABCA.

SECTION TWELVE: STANDARDS FOR SOCIAL MEDIA USE

Communication on ABCA social media should use the same high standard and high level of professionalism as other forms of communication (e.g., phone calls; in-person visits; emails; etc.)

Directors and staff must comply with the applicable Codes of Conduct.

Consistent with the Code of Conduct:

1. Employees, directors, and volunteers are accountable for what they share or write on social media, whether on ABCA channels or personal channels.

Staff, directors, and volunteers are prohibited from:

2. Using online space for bullying or harassment.
3. Sharing content that is unkind, intimidating, or discriminates on the basis of religion; race; colour; national origin; creed; age; sex or sexual orientation; or disability.

4. Sharing confidential or proprietary information; making defamatory statements; or discriminatory statements or innuendo; or otherwise breaching corporate policy.

Staff, directors, and volunteers must:

5. Refrain from public messages likely to give offence.
6. Follow all legal requirements as well as standards of decorum.
7. Be fair, accurate, and respectful of copyright and intellectual property.
8. Follow established ABCA policies on respectful communications, copyright laws, intellectual property, no harassment, and not bullying when posting social media content.

Ausable Bayfield Conservation comments on ABCA social media accounts *should not* include:

9. Partisan comments; Encouragement of unsafe activity; Profane language or profane content.

SECTION THIRTEEN: PERSONAL HOME USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

1. For staff personal account policies, the *Human Resources Policy Statement* and *Personnel Regulation* and technology policies apply.
2. Directors and staff members may choose to use social media outside of work as private citizens. The *Social Media Policy* is not intended to govern all personal discourse, unrelated to their ABCA work, by staff and directors, on their personal social media accounts. However, even outside ABCA, staff and directors should conduct themselves appropriately and not bring ABCA into disrepute.
3. Directors and staff are required to abide by all corporate policies and procedures including when speaking with and about ABCA matters. Only the Chair, or General Manager, should speak, on behalf of ABCA, on matters of ABCA policy.
4. Personal social media accounts should have a disclaimer, visible somewhere in their account (e.g., biography section), that their opinions are their own.
5. If staff members or directors have identified themselves as ABCA employees or directors on their personal social media accounts they should include disclaimers (e.g., ‘*This opinion is my own*’) in content postings if their personal opinion is likely to be confused with the ABCA position.
6. Staff and directors need to be aware of their responsibility, as ABCA representatives, to maintain the strong public reputation held by Ausable Bayfield Conservation. Directors and staff should strive to maintain the highest standards on social media in order to protect and enhance the public’s confidence in, and respect for, our work and our organization. All personal uses of social media platforms by staff and board members must adhere to the same ethical standards of conduct that they must otherwise follow.
7. Even in personal social media, employees and directors who reference ABCA, its programs and services, are, according to this policy, expected to do so accurately and positively. Staff and directors will refrain from posting negative comments about other staff, volunteers, clients, partners, directors, or members of the public on personal social media accounts.

SECTION FOURTEEN: USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA AT WORK

1. Rules governing employee use of social media, in the office building or during work hours, are included in the *Personnel Regulation* and/or other policies.
2. Some staff may use social media platforms for work purposes, as directed by management, but they are not to use personal accounts for personal reasons during working hours.
3. The *Personnel Regulation* should be reviewed from time to time to ensure policies are effective to govern use of social media at work.
4. During regular working hours, employees may use personal social media accounts on official breaks, such as meals, but social media use should not negatively impact productivity or efficiency. ABCA Internet access may be monitored; excessive or unauthorized use of social media for personal reasons may be subject to disciplinary action including termination.

SECTION FIFTEEN: PRIOR REVIEW OF POSTS

1. Some of the value in social media is in its currency. Old or stale media posts may not engage our audiences. At the same time, a rush to share content could lead to inconsistencies or inaccuracies and it may be prudent to wait, review, reflect upon, and edit most content before posting.
2. It will be at the discretion of managers to authorize in-the-field posts when advisable. In some cases, these may be valuable (e.g., ‘Here we are at the Lake Huron conference – come visit our display’) but rushed posts can also lead to errors or inconsistent or negative or harmful messaging and prior review is recommended in most cases.
3. Whenever possible, posts should be reviewed in advance or immediately after posting by Communications Specialist, or alternate, in order to ensure accuracy and consistency of style and messaging in order to prevent potential damage to organizational reputation and to reduce risk to the organization.

SECTION SIXTEEN: SOCIAL MEDIA STRATEGY

1. Management, with input from staff including communications staff, should maintain, evaluate, review, and update regularly a *Social Media Strategy*.
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