
Social Software Policy

Adopted: September 10, 2008

POLICY

Multnomah County Library offers blogs, community reviews, patron comments and other social software tools for educational, cultural, civic and recreational purposes. MCL social software tools provide a limited (or designated) public forum to facilitate the sharing of ideas, opinions and information about library-related subjects and issues. MCL social software is intended to create a welcoming and inviting online space where MCL users will find useful and entertaining information and can interact with library staff and other MCL users. Comments are moderated by library staff and the library reserves the right to remove comments that are unlawful or off topic. Staff who contribute or moderate social websites on behalf of the library must follow specific rules to maintain the reputation of the library as well as to protect the First Amendment rights of citizens.

This policy addresses the use of social software in three respects:

1. Content created by MCL staff while on the job for Web applications, sites or accounts created and maintained by Multnomah County Library, or on non-MCL community blogs or sites
2. Content created by MCL staff on personal time for Web applications, sites or accounts created and maintained by themselves or other members of the community, that share opinions and information about library related subjects and issues.
3. Staff responsibilities for moderating public contributions to social software

RATIONALE

As social software is becoming ubiquitous, the Multnomah County Library is beginning to appropriately incorporate it into library services. Library users have requested opportunities to interact with one another and with library staff online. The library uses social software to facilitate these exchanges on library-related subjects and issues.

DEFINITION OF SOCIAL SOFTWARE

Social software is defined as any web application, site or account that facilitates the sharing of opinions and information about library related subjects and issues.

Social software includes such formats as blogs, listserves, websites, social network pages or posts (e.g. MySpace, FaceBook, Flickr, Live Journal, etc)

BLOGGING or commenting AS A LIBRARY EMPLOYEE

As public employees, Library employees' free speech rights in the workplace are different than those of the general public. They are subject to a balancing act between the right of a public employer to operate efficiently and employees' free speech rights. The County's personnel rules incorporate limitations on free speech intended to maintain efficient government operations. Examples are MCPR 3-10 Employees' Responsibilities which requires employees to relate to co-workers and the public in a courteous, professional and respectful manner; MCPR 3-40 Discrimination and Harassment-Free Workplace; and MCPR 3-35 Use of Information Technology, setting standards for use of county systems and electronic communications by employees.

Policies and best practices: Social Software activity done while on the job

It is expected that all content on MCL-sponsored social software (or done on library work time on community blogs) will be professionally presented. Specifically, content must be compliant with Multnomah County personnel rules, Discrimination and Harassment-free Workplace and Use of Information Technology (IT) rules. Writers and content contributors should check facts, cite sources, avoid copyright infringement, present balanced views, acknowledge and correct errors, and check spelling and grammar before making a post live.

Like any type of promotion/outreach, posting content about the library on social software can become a workload issue. Participants are encouraged to work with their supervisors to ensure that their efforts in this area are consistent with available time and resources.

Writers are expected to put a “best foot forward” on the MCL activities they discuss online. It is a given that when MCL library staff speak or write on the job, online or elsewhere, that they are speaking for the Library, and the content they provide should present the Library positively.

While the development of original content is desirable in many situations, library writers are also encouraged to use existing text and language created by HR and PR staff to promote the library’s services and programs, thereby strengthening the Library’s ability to repeat (and underscore) key messages. Public Relations approval is required for anything posted as an official statement of the Multnomah County Library. Note that the Library Director is the Library’s official spokesperson.

MCL reserves the right to review content before it is posted and to modify, remove or prohibit any messages or postings that it deems to be inappropriate.

The following content should be avoided by library staff writers:

- Personal attacks, insults or threatening language
- Libelous and/or defamatory statements
- Plagiarized material
- Private and personal information
- Comments unrelated to the content of the forum, and/or hyperlinks to material not directly related to the discussion
- Commercial promotions or spam
- Information shared with library staff and stakeholders that is in draft form or is pending publication

Staff members with questions about the appropriateness of content they are considering posting are encouraged to review their work with their managers before making the content live. Managers will make decisions based on this policy.

Policies and best practices: Social Software activity that happens on personal time/ while not on the job

In their capacity as private citizens, library employees have the same right to self-expression enjoyed by members of the community as a whole. This section focuses on content created by MCL staff on personal time for Web applications, sites or accounts created and maintained by themselves or other members of the community.

Staff members must keep in mind the following best practices when posting content about library related subjects and issues on personal time:

- Make it clear that the views expressed are yours alone and do not represent the views of your employer.
- Respect the library’s confidentiality and proprietary information. Do not post information that has been shared with staff but is still in draft form and pending publication.
- Ask your manager if you have questions about what is appropriate to include on your blog.
- Be respectful of the library, its employees, volunteers, partners, competitors and critics.
- Ensure that your personal blogging activity does not interfere with your work commitments.

MODERATING PUBLIC CONTENT

Social software library web applications that allow users to comment are designated (or limited) public forums, and as such, are protected by the First Amendment. There are rules for public contributions just as we have rules for behavior in the library. Refer to [Social Software Policy for Multnomah County Library Users](#). Public comments and other contributions must be moderated by staff responsible for library social software to ensure public contributions comply with library rules. Refer to the [Social Software Comment Guidelines for Staff Moderators](#) for details about moderating social software and guidelines for questionable comments.

This policy was approved by Cindy Gibbon on September 10, 2008.

REQUESTING SOCIAL SOFTWARE

New web applications must be requested through the Web Services Coordinator or Website Planning Team. For new social software applications, fill out a [request form](#) and send to Arlene Keller (arlenek).