

RNLI Social Media Policy

Policy Owner

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Owning Department

Fundraising, Marketing and Media

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May 2024

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May 2026

Reason for Policy

This social media policy establishes guidelines and requirements for consistent and responsible online behaviour for internal staff, volunteers, and crew. It ensures alignment with the RNLI's organisational values, helps to protect its reputation, and minimises potential risk associated with online content – fostering a positive, professional, and beneficial online presence.

Objective of Policy

To protect staff and volunteers, the RNLI and its supporters, and those we work with.

To ensure staff and volunteers are able to raise brand awareness and amplify our work in a positive light on social media.

To protect confidential and sensitive information that belongs to the RNLI, covering security, privacy, and legal interests.

Applicability

All RNLI staff and volunteers and anyone working on behalf of the RNLI.

1. Introduction

Social Media platforms are great ways for the RNLI to reach its supporters and the public directly, without relying on an intermediary such as the press. It allows the RNLI to inspire and inform people, answer questions and enquiries, and also listen to what people have to say about the organisation. Staff and volunteers are brilliant advocates for the charity and often use social media to tell others about the RNLI, its work and our cause.

It's important to remember that social media is open to the public. Users should adhere to this policy and associated guidance when sharing information or opinions. While the RNLI encourages staff and volunteers to talk about their roles and association with the organisation, individuals must be careful to adhere to the charity's values and behaviours. Even if they state that their opinions are their own and not the RNLI's, poor behaviour and offensive language or images can all reflect badly on the RNLI.

The RNLI expects a high standard of behaviour from its staff and volunteers on social media, especially those who represent or link themselves to the charity, regardless of whether this is on official RNLI or personal accounts.

Breach of this policy may lead to disciplinary action.

Social Media Policy

2. OPERATIONAL ACTIVITY

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Department: FM&M

- 2.1 RNLI staff and volunteers must never use social media to live stream material during a rescue, on-going incident, or when training. The RNLI has a duty of care to casualties to protect their privacy and treat them with respect – live streaming does not allow for the important step of asking for consent, moderation or editing a video. Casualties’ loved ones may not be aware that they are in danger and should never find out via a social media post/stream. There are also legal implications of broadcasting communications or working with third parties such as the MCA / Irish Coast Guard.
- 2.2 RNLI staff and volunteers should never post about a launch until the incident is over, and all parties related to the incident directly or indirectly have had the opportunity to learn about it first-hand. The reason for this being that any social media posts related to a launch will trigger calls from the media and raise concerns within a community before we have all the information they require. Always adhere to the RNLI Film and Image Policy (this includes drone use guidance that must be followed).
- 2.3 In addition to this, staff and volunteers must refrain from sharing information regarding an incident until their local station and/or lifeguarding region has had the opportunity to post it on their official channel(s). This is to safeguard the integrity of the station's posts, preventing dilution by external parties. By allowing the original post to take precedence, we can maximise engagement and enhance our brand awareness.
- 2.4 The social media team may, on occasion, be authorised to post updates during a long incident prior to its conclusion, particularly if there is a high level of media interest. Such instances are rare and posts are only made with the agreement of the relevant teams.
- 2.5 When posting about a rescue never disclose more information than you would include in a press release and all rescue footage and photography will need to have gone through the Source approval process.

3. ACCUSATIONS AND SENSITIVE INFORMATION

- 3.1 RNLI staff and volunteers must never use social media to insult, abuse or level accusations at individuals or organisations (including the RNLI). Concerns or complaints should be raised using the appropriate channels. RNLI staff and volunteers must never use social media to discuss potentially sensitive or personal information about incidents, casualties, fellow volunteers / staff or other agencies.

4. CREATING OFFICIAL RNLI SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNTS

- 4.1 RNLI staff and volunteers must never create new social media profiles to represent the RNLI without the prior approval of the RNLI’s Social Media team – this includes RNLI teams, departments or regions. Anyone who creates such an account without prior approval may be asked to delete it. (This does not apply to official lifeboat station, lifeguard and volunteer fundraising branch social media channels – see section 7).

5. ACCOUNT VERIFICATION/BLUE TICKS

- 5.1 Only the central RNLI accounts should be verified by the platforms. Verified accounts are typically those for which a blue tick appears next to the username. This is to maintain a hierarchy of accounts and to ensure that questions from the public can be dealt with quickly and consistently by the social media team. Do not purchase a blue tick by subscribing to Twitter/X Blue.

6. SOCIAL MEDIA USE DURING WORK HOURS

- 6.1 Use of social media during working hours should support and enhance normal business. While personal use is not prohibited, it must never impact negatively on the core responsibilities or productivity of a job role. This

relates to use of RNLI computers /devices as well as staff and volunteers' own devices. The Acceptable Use Policy governs the use of the RNLI computers and communication resources for RNLI staff and volunteers.

7. STATION, BRANCH AND LIFEGUARD SOCIAL MEDIA CONTENT

7.1 Lifeboat Stations

7.1.1. Lifeboat stations are encouraged to use social media to promote their work and engage with and build communities. The Lifeboat Press Officer and Lifeboat Operations Manager must be consulted before new social media accounts are created for a lifeboat station, and your Regional Media Team should be informed.

7.1.2 An official RNLI Facebook account must have two admins from the station plus another RNLI staff member including either your Regional Media Team or Area Lifesaving Manager. This is to help protect both volunteers and the RNLI in the event of a security breach and comply with Data Protection regulations.

7.1.3 Station social media admins should complete the Social Media training provided by the ME team and must work with the station's LPO to plan and deliver social media activity. All profiles with admin access to RNLI pages must have two-factor authentication (2FA) turned on.

7.1.4 For channels such as Twitter/X and Instagram, which require an email and password to set up, the email used must be a team inbox and never a private, personal account. The password should be sufficiently hard to guess and must be shared with either your Regional Media Team or Area Lifesaving Manager and no more than four other people (five in total). If a person with access to the account leaves the RNLI, their admin / editor access should be removed immediately, and passwords refreshed afterwards.

7.1.5 Stations wishing to use paid advertising on social media must first consult their Regional Media Team or the RNLI's Social Media team (See section 12).

7.1.6 Some social media platforms offer the ability to accept donations within the platforms themselves and there are data protection considerations to manage here. Any new applications for in-platform fundraising – for example, a Facebook Donate or other fundraising account – must be completed or approved by the RNLI's Social Media team. Training is available for stations who would like to use Facebook charitable giving tools and other in-platform fundraising features. Consult your Regional Media Team for further information.

7.2 Engagement Volunteers

7.2.1 Whenever possible, fundraising branches, retail and other Engagement volunteers wishing to use social media should work with their local lifeboat station and feed information about fundraising events and retail/souvenir promotions to them. Stations may wish to grant a representative of their local fundraising branch access to their social media account/s but this is solely at the station's discretion. To discuss an existing or potential social media account to represent the RNLI officially, fundraising and retail volunteers should speak to their Community Manager, who in turn will consult the Social Media team.

7.3 Lifeguards

7.3.1 Lifeguards must seek permission from their Lead Supervisor before creating new beach/area social media accounts to officially represent the RNLI, who must make the Regional Media Team and/or the RNLI's Social Media team aware. Additionally, RNLI Lifeguards should never use a mobile phone or other digital display device whilst on operational duties.

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Department: FM&M

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- 7.3.2 An official RNLI Facebook account should have at least two admins but no more than five, one of which must be your Regional Media Team or Lead Supervisor. All profiles with admin access to RNLI pages must have two factor authentication (2FA) turned on.
- 7.3.3 All admins must ensure that content and comments are appropriate for the channel and the audience, taking action if there is any inappropriate content shared. The Regional Media Team and/or Social Media Team are on hand to advise with cases like these.
- 7.3.4 For channels such as Twitter/X and Instagram, which require an email and password to set up, the email used must be a team inbox and never a private, personal account. The password should be sufficiently hard to guess and must be shared with either your Regional Media Team or Lead Supervisor and no more than four other people (five in total).
- 7.3.5 If a person with access to the account leaves the RNLI, their admin / editor access should be removed immediately, and passwords refreshed afterwards.
- 7.3.6 Lifeguards must not use paid advertising on social media.

8. ADHERENCE TO PLATFORM TERMS AND CONDITIONS

- 8.1 Staff and volunteers should adhere to the terms and conditions of the social media platforms they use for RNLI business or to discuss/promote their association with the RNLI. Where a social media platform's terms and conditions forbid it, staff and volunteers should not create duplicate profiles – that is, one for personal use and one for RNLI business. Facebook, for example, forbids individuals from having more than one Facebook account.

9. DISCRIMINATION, TROLLING OR BULLYING

- 9.1 RNLI staff and volunteers must not use social media in a way that could be considered discriminatory or to bully or harass any individual, for example by:
- Making offensive or derogatory comments relating to a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010 – these include gender, gender reassignment, race (including nationality), disability, sexual orientation, religion or belief, age, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy or maternity;
 - Posting images that are discriminatory or offensive, or links to such content.
- 9.2 Cyber bullying is that which takes place online or using other digital tools like text or WhatsApp messages and will not be tolerated at the RNLI. If you think you are the victim of cyber bullying yourself, we encourage you to talk to your line manager or the People Department.
- 9.3 See Horizon for guidance on the use of WhatsApp for RNLI staff and volunteers.

10. COMMUNICATING WITH CHILDREN AND VULNERABLE ADULTS

- 10.1 Communication with children and vulnerable adults, by whatever method, should take place within clear and explicit professional boundaries. UK Government guidance states:

‘Adults should not share any personal information with a child or young person. They should not request, or respond to, any personal information from the child/young person. Adults should ensure that all communications are transparent and open to scrutiny.’

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11. ASKS AND APPROACHES

11.1 When using social media for RNLI matters, approaches for business or big asks for financial support should be kept out of the public domain – if your contact is unable to commit to your request, they may feel uncomfortable responding in front of an audience.

12. PAID SOCIAL MEDIA ADVERTISING

12.1 Under no circumstances should paid-for social media advertising be commissioned or set live by a third party (eg advertising agency) without the prior knowledge and authorisation of the RNLI's Social Media team. All media plans that include social media advertising must be signed off by the Senior Social Media Manager.

13. CELEBRITY, SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCER AND VIP RELATIONS/ENGAGEMENT

13.1 The Media Engagement team monitor celebrity and social media influencer activity linked to the RNLI. Everyone who would like to engage with celebrities, influencers or ambassadors must:

- Inform the press office at pressoffice@rnli.org.uk and/or Social Media team at social@rnli.org.uk if they are engaging with **any** celebrities or social media influencers on behalf of the RNLI before they make contact or a new request
- Remember the importance of due diligence prior to approaching a celebrity or social media influencer – the RNLI's reputation must always be the priority and associating with celebrities with a negative reputation/past can impact this
- The RNLI does not pay celebrities or social media influencers to support the charity

13.2 For further guidance you can contact the Social Media team via social@rnli.org.uk or the Press Office at pressoffice@rnli.org.uk / 01202 336789.

Related Policies, Procedures & Guidance

Guidance on the use of WhatsApp for RNLI staff and volunteers
Camera Operations Procedures, GDPR and Consent
Media Policy
RNLI Film and Image Policy
Social Media - Acceptable Use Policy
Drone use guidance

Related Forms & Instructions

For further guidance you can contact:
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