



## **Social Media & Public Communication Policy**

### **Article I – Scope of Policy**

This policy applies to: the Chief Executive Officer, members of the Board, staff and contractors, and volunteers.

It covers:

- Social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, X, YouTube, etc.);
  - Website content;
  - Email newsletters;
  - Press releases and media interviews;
  - Public presentations;
  - Printed materials;
  - Public statements made in a professional capacity.
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### **Article II – Purpose**

Because NEXTSTEP: Unlocked Potential (the “Corporation”; “NEXTSTEP”) serves survivors of domestic violence, including women, men, and children, communications must prioritize safety, confidentiality, and survivor autonomy above all other considerations.

The purpose of policy is to:

- Protect the safety, dignity, and confidentiality of survivors of domestic violence;
  - Ensure consistent, accurate, trauma-informed communication;
  - Maintain compliance with applicable federal, state, and local confidentiality laws;
  - Safeguard the reputation, credibility, and mission of the organization;
  - Provide clear guidance to staff, volunteers, board members, and contractors regarding public communications.
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## **Article III – Guiding Principles**

All public communications must reflect the following principles:

### **Section 1. Survivor Safety First**

- No identifying information about clients or their families may be shared without documented, informed, written consent;
- Even with consent, staff must evaluate potential safety risks before publication;
- Location information about shelters or confidential services must never be disclosed.

### **Section 2. Confidentiality and Privacy**

- The organization complies with all applicable confidentiality laws and ethical standards;
- Client names, images, identifying details, case specifics, or timelines must never be shared without proper authorization;
- Stories used for awareness must be anonymized and sufficiently altered to prevent identification.

### **Section 3. Trauma-Informed Communication**

- Avoid victim-blaming language;
- Use empowering, person-first language (e.g., “survivor of domestic violence” rather than defining individuals solely by abuse);
- Avoid graphic descriptions of violence;
- Promote hope, resilience, and available support.

### **Section 4. Accuracy and Integrity**

- Information shared must be fact-checked and accurate;
- Statistics must be sourced from reputable organizations;
- Public messaging must align with the organization’s mission and values.

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## **Article IV – Authorization & Oversight**

### **Section 1. Official Accounts**

Only designated staff members approved by leadership may:

- Create or manage official social media accounts;
- Post on behalf of the Organization;
- Respond to public inquiries via official platforms.

Account access credentials must be securely stored and limited to authorized personnel.

## **Section 2. Media Inquiries**

- All media inquiries must be directed to the Chief Executive Officer, the Board President, or designated Communications Lead;
  - Staff and volunteers may not provide interviews or official statements without prior authorization;
  - When appropriate, prepared talking points shall be used to ensure consistent messaging.
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## **Article V – Use of Client Stories, Images, & Testimonials**

### **Section 1. Written Consent Required**

Before sharing any client story, photo, video, or testimonial:

- Written, informed consent must be obtained using an approved release form;
- Consent must clearly outline how and where the content will be used;
- Clients must be informed that declining consent will not affect services.

### **Section 2. Safety Review**

Even with written consent:

- Staff must assess potential safety risks;
- Identifying details should be removed whenever possible;
- Use of pseudonyms and composite stories is strongly encouraged.

### **Section 3. Children**

- Extra caution must be exercised when discussing children.
  - Parental/guardian consent is required where legally applicable.
  - Images of children in shelter or confidential settings are strictly prohibited.
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## **Article VI – Personal Social Media Use**

Employees, volunteers, and board members:

- Must not disclose confidential information about clients, cases, or shelter locations;
- Must not represent personal opinions as official organizational positions;
- Should include a disclaimer when discussing related issues (e.g., “Views are my own and do not represent my employer.”).

Staff are strongly encouraged to avoid “checking in” or tagging confidential locations.

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## **Article VII – Comment & Content moderation & Community Standards**

The Organization reserves the right to:

- Remove comments that contain hate speech, threats, harassment, misinformation, or victim-blaming content;
- Block users who repeatedly violate community standards;
- Report credible threats to appropriate authorities.

We aim to maintain online spaces that are safe, respectful, and supportive.

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## **Article VIII – Crisis & Sensitive Incidents**

During high-profile domestic violence cases or community crises:

- Only designated leadership may issue public statements;
  - Messaging must avoid speculation;
  - Communications should focus on available resources and survivor support;
  - The safety of clients and staff must remain paramount.
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## **Article IX – Photography & Events**

At public events:

- Attendees must be informed if photography or video recording will occur;
- Individuals must have the opportunity to opt out;
- No photographs may reveal confidential client locations.

Shelter interiors, security features, and client living areas must never be publicly shared.

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## **Article X – Data Security**

- Social media accounts must use strong passwords and multi-factor authentication;
  - Access must be removed immediately upon staff departure;
  - Sensitive communication should not occur through public messaging platforms.
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## **Article XI – Policy Violations**

Violations of this policy may result in:

- Disciplinary action (up to and including termination of and/or removal of employment, Board position, volunteer status, etc.);
  - Legal consequences if applicable laws are breached.
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## **Article XII – Policy Review**

This policy shall be reviewed annually by the Board and updated as necessary to reflect:

- Changes in law;
  - Best practices in victim advocacy.
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This policy was reviewed and approved by the NEXTSTEP: Unlocked Potential Board of Directors.

**Date Approved:** 4 Apr 2026

