

Otter Valley Association

Social Media Policy

A guide for the Otter Valley Association (OVA) charity trustees, committee members and representatives on using social media to promote the work of the OVA and in a personal capacity.

Change History

- Version 1.0 created on 1st March 2024
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Introduction

What is social media?

Social media is the term given to web-based tools and applications which enable users to create and share content (words, images and video content), and network with each other through the sharing of information, opinions, knowledge and common interests. Examples of social media include Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), LinkedIn and Instagram.

Why do we use social media?

Social media is essential to the success of communicating the Otter Valley Association's work. It is important for some OVA trustees and OVA representatives to participate in social media to engage with our audience, participate in relevant conversations and raise the profile of the Otter Valley Association's work.

Why do we need a social media policy?

The difference between a personal and professional opinion can be blurred on social media, particularly if you're discussing issues relating to the Otter Valley Association's work. While we encourage the use of social media, we have certain standards, outlined in this policy, which we require everyone to observe. Publication and commentary on social media carries similar obligations to any other kind of publication or commentary in the public domain.

This policy is intended for all Trustee's, Committee Members and representatives, and applies to content posted on social media sites. Before engaging in OVA-related social media activity, such personnel must read this policy.

Setting out the social media policy

This policy sets out guidelines on how social media should be used to support the delivery and promotion of the Otter Valley Association, and the use of social media by OVA trustees and OVA representatives in both a professional and personal capacity. It sets out what you need to be aware of when interacting in these spaces and is designed to help OVA trustees and OVA representatives support and expand our official social media channels, while protecting the charity and its reputation and preventing any legal issues.

Point of contact for social media

The OVA Editor is responsible for the day-to-day publishing, monitoring and management of our social media channels. If you have specific questions about any aspect of these channels, speak to the OVA Editor. Anyone can post information on any social media platform – including the OVA groups. As such, individuals are personally responsible for their content. In addition, other trustees and committee members can post "OVA specific content" that represents the OVA on the Otter Valley Association's official channels without the permission of the OVA Editor or the OVA Chairperson.

Which social media channels do we use?

The Otter Valley Association currently uses the following social media channels:

- Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/ottervalleyassociation/>). This is used to share news with OVA supporters, and to encourage people to become involved in our work. As of the 30th April 2025 this has grown to a community of 923 supports. We categorise members of the OVA Facebook group as "supporters" since they do not have to be fee-paying members of the OVA.
- Whatsapp. This is used by various groups to share information and organise projects (e.g.: OVA Walkers; Water Quality team; Flora, Fauna & Fungi team).

- Instagram. This has been setup to share pictures relating to the subjects covered by the OVA.

Guidelines

Using the Otter Valley Association's social media channels — appropriate conduct

1. The OVA Editor is responsible for setting up and managing the OVA's social media channels. Only those authorised to do so by the OVA Editor will have administration access to these accounts.
2. The OVA Editor monitors the various social channels and will respond to comments as and when required. If additional input is required, the OVA Editor will seek advice from the chairman or other trustees.
3. Be an ambassador for our brand. OVA trustees and OVA representatives should ensure they reflect the OVA values in what they post.
4. Make sure that all social media content has a purpose and a benefit for the OVA, and accurately reflects the OVA's agreed position.
5. Bring value to our audience(s). Answer their questions, help and engage with them.
6. Take care with the presentation of content. Make sure that there are no typos, misspellings or grammatical errors. Also check the quality of images.
7. Always pause and think before posting. That said, reply to comments in a timely manner, when a response is appropriate.
8. Committee members should not post content about supporters or other members without their express permission. If they are sharing information about supporters, other members or third party organisations, this content should be clearly labelled so our audiences know it has not come directly from the OVA. If using interviews, videos or photos that clearly identify a child or young person, OVA trustees and OVA representatives must ensure they have the consent of a parent or guardian before using them on social media.
9. Always check facts. OVA trustees and OVA representatives should not automatically assume that material is accurate and should take reasonable steps where necessary to seek verification, for example, by checking data/statistics and being wary of photo manipulation.
10. Be honest. Say what you know to be true or have a good source for. If you've made a mistake, don't be afraid to admit it.
11. OVA trustees and OVA representatives should refrain from offering personal opinions via the OVA's social media accounts, either directly by commenting or indirectly by 'liking', 'sharing' or 'retweeting'. If you are in doubt about the OVA's position on a particular issue, please speak to the OVA Editor or one of the OVA trustees.
12. It is vital that the OVA does not encourage others to risk their personal safety or that of others, to gather materials. For example, a video of a stunt.

13. OVA trustees and OVA representatives should not encourage people to break the law to supply material for social media, such as using unauthorised video footage. All relevant rights for usage must be obtained before publishing material.
14. OVA trustees and OVA representatives should not set up other Facebook groups or pages, X (formerly Twitter) accounts or any other social media channels on behalf of the OVA. This could confuse messaging and brand awareness. By having official social media accounts in place, the OVA Editor can ensure consistency of the brand and focus on building a strong following.
15. The OVA is not a political organisation and does not hold a view on party politics or have any affiliation with or links to political parties. We have every right to express views on policy, including the policies of parties, but we cannot tell people how to vote.
16. If a complaint is made on the OVA's social media channels, OVA trustees and OVA representatives should seek advice from the OVA Editor before responding. If they are not available, then they should speak to the OVA Chairperson or other trustee.
17. Sometimes issues can arise on social media which can escalate into a crisis situation because they are sensitive or risk serious damage to the charity's reputation. The nature of social media means that complaints are visible and can escalate quickly. Not acting can be detrimental to our charity.

The OVA Editor regularly monitors our social media spaces for mentions of the OVA so we can catch any issues or problems early. If there is an issue that could develop or has already developed into a crisis situation, the trustees will implement a relevant crisis management plan – led by the chairman and secretary.

If any OVA trustees or OVA representatives outside of the OVA Editor become aware of any comments online that they think have the potential to escalate into a crisis, whether on the OVA's social media channels or elsewhere, they should speak to the OVA Editor immediately.

Use of personal social media accounts — appropriate conduct

This policy does not intend to inhibit personal use of social media but instead flags up those areas in which conflicts might arise. OVA trustees and OVA representatives are expected to behave appropriately, and in ways that are consistent with the OVA's values and policies, both online and in real life.

1. Be aware that any information you make public could affect how people perceive the OVA. You must make it clear when you are speaking for yourself and not on behalf of the OVA. If you are using your personal social media accounts to promote and talk about the OVA's work, you must use a disclaimer such as: ***"The views expressed on this site are my own and don't necessarily represent the Otter Valley Association's positions, policies or opinions."***
2. OVA trustees or OVA representatives who have a personal blog or website which indicates in any way that they work at the OVA should discuss any potential conflicts of interest with the OVA Editor or OVA Chairman. Similarly, OVA trustees or OVA representatives who want to start blogging and wish to say that they work for the OVA should discuss any potential conflicts of interest with the OVA Editor or OVA Chairman.

3. Use common sense and good judgement. Be aware of your association with the OVA and ensure your profile and related content is consistent with how you wish to present yourself to the general public and OVA members.
4. The OVA may work with high-profile people, such as celebrities, journalists or politicians. Please don't approach them from your personal social media accounts to ask them to support the charity, as this could hinder any potential OVA relationships that are being managed. This includes asking for retweets about the charity.
5. If you are contacted by the press about your social media posts that relate to the OVA, you should talk to the Chairman immediately and under no circumstances respond directly.
6. The OVA is not a political organisation and does not hold a view on party politics or have any affiliation with or links to political parties. When representing the OVA, OVA trustees and OVA representatives are expected to hold the OVA's position of neutrality. OVA trustees and OVA representatives who are politically active in their spare time need to be clear in separating their personal political identity from the OVA and understand and avoid potential conflicts of interest.
7. Never use the OVA's logos or trademarks unless approved to do so. Permission to use logos should be requested from the OVA editor or OVA webmaster.
8. Always protect yourself and the charity. Be careful with your privacy online and be cautious when sharing personal information. What you publish is widely accessible and will be around for a long time, so do consider the content carefully. When you are using social media sites at work, it is important that you do so safely.
9. Think about your reputation as well as the charity's. Express your opinions and deal with differences of opinion respectfully. Don't insult people or treat them badly. Passionate discussions and debates are fine, but you should always be respectful of others and their opinions. Be polite and the first to correct your own mistakes.
10. We encourage everyone to share, or comment on, Facebook posts or tweets that the OVA may issue. When online in a personal capacity, you might also see opportunities to comment on or support the OVA and the work we do. Where appropriate and using the guidelines within this policy, we encourage OVA trustees and OVA representatives to do this as it provides a human voice and raises our profile. However, if the content is controversial or misrepresented, please highlight this to the OVA Editor who will respond as appropriate.

Further guidelines

Libel

Libel is when a false written statement that is damaging to a person's reputation is published online or in print. Whether OVA trustees or OVA representatives are posting content on social media as part of their job or in a personal capacity, they should not bring the OVA into disrepute by making defamatory comments about individuals or other organisations or groups.

Copyright law

It is critical that all trustees and representatives abide by the laws governing copyright, under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988. Never use or adapt someone else's images or written content without permission. Failing to acknowledge the source/author/resource citation, where permission has been given to reproduce content, is also considered a breach of copyright.

Confidentiality

Any communications that OVA trustees and OVA representatives make in a personal capacity must not breach confidentiality. For example, information meant for internal use only or information that the OVA is not ready to disclose yet. For example, a news story that is embargoed for a particular date.

Discrimination and harassment

OVA trustees and OVA representatives should not post content that could be considered discriminatory against, or bullying or harassment of, any individual, on either an official OVA social media channel or a personal account. For example:

- making offensive or derogatory comments relating to sex, gender, race, disability, sexual orientation, age, religion or belief
- using social media to bully another individual
- posting images that are discriminatory or offensive or links to such content

Lobbying Act

Charities are legally allowed to campaign to bring about a change in policy or law to further their organisational purpose. In most cases, spending on charity campaigns that are in accordance with charity law will not be regulated under electoral law. However, the Lobbying Act, which was passed in January 2014, states that during national elections (known as regulated periods) spending on campaigning activities may be regulated.

Charities which spend more than £20,000 in England or £10,000 in Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland, during the regulated period, need to register with the Electoral Commission. To abide by the Lobbying Act, campaigning activities on social media must not be seen as intending to influence people's voting choice. During these periods, all campaigning activity will be reviewed by the OVA Editor.

Protection and intervention

The responsibility for measures of protection and intervention lies first with the social networking site itself. Different social networking sites offer different models of interventions in different areas. For more information, refer to the guidance available on the social networking site itself. For example, Facebook. However, if an OVA trustee or OVA representative considers that a person/people is/are at risk of harm, they should report this to the OVA Chairperson immediately.

Under 18s and vulnerable people

Young and vulnerable people face risks when using social networking sites. They may be at risk of being bullied, publishing sensitive and personal information on their profiles, or from becoming targets for online grooming.

Where known, when communicating with young people under 18-years-old via social media, OVA trustees and OVA representatives should ensure the online relationship with the OVA follows the same rules as the offline 'real-life' relationship. OVA trustees and OVA representatives should ensure that young people have been made aware of the risks of communicating and sharing information online, and given guidance on security/privacy settings as necessary. OVA trustees and OVA representatives should also ensure that the site

itself is suitable for the young person and the OVA content and other content is appropriate for them. Please refer to our safeguarding policy (on the OVA site here:

<https://www.ova.org.uk/sites/default/files/common/OVA Safeguarding Policy 2023.pdf>

Responsibilities and breach of policy

Everyone is responsible for their own compliance with this policy. Participation in social media on behalf of the OVA is not a right but an opportunity, so it must be treated seriously and with respect. For OVA trustees and OVA representatives, breaches of policy may incur disciplinary action, depending on the severity of the issue, per the discretion of the OVA chairperson. OVA trustees or OVA representatives who are unsure about whether something they propose to do on social media might breach this policy, should seek advice from the Chairman.

Review

This policy will be reviewed annually.

Date of Adoption

The Trustees of the OVA agreed and adopted this Policy at the Executive Committee meeting on 27th May 2025

Signed

Haylor Lass,

Chair

Date 27th May 2025