

COL Guidelines on Public Contributions by Staff

Blogging, discussion groups, personal web pages and other contributory websites have become a popular pastime for many people both in their work and personal lives. The term “blogging” will be collectively used in this document for all forms of contributory sites and the activity of contributing text and graphics to websites.

As with any communication, blogging can range from being advantageous to the organisation to being destructive. All communication by COL staff, whether public or one-on-one, electronic or other means, should support the values and objectives of the organisation and respect the opinions and values of others. The following guidelines for public communications by COL staff draw heavily on the policy published by IBM which is available on its website¹.

Introduction

Whether or not a COL staff member chooses to create or participate in a blog or a wiki or other form of online publishing or discussion is his or her own decision. Some reasons for blogging include:

To learn: As a learning organisation, we believe in the importance of open exchange and learning from each other.

To contribute: COL is an inter-governmental organisation that responds to the needs of Commonwealth Governments. COL staff have a significant profile internationally and make important contributions to the world of education which impact on many people – it is increasingly important for COL to share with the world information on the initiatives we are implementing, what we are learning and doing, and to learn from others.

Guidelines for COL bloggers:

1. Know and follow COL's values, standards of conduct, current practices and Commonwealth responsibilities. Be familiar with COL's policies and procedures². You are “known” in education and development circles and your link to COL is almost inevitable, therefore what you say may be misconstrued as a COL policy or approach. Remember that the more known you are internationally, the more difficult it becomes to separate your personal profile from the profile your employer.
2. Blogs, wikis and other forms of online discourse are individual interactions, not corporate communications and therefore are not usually “vetted” by management, as a newsletter would be. COL staff members are personally responsible for the material they upload to websites and the potential impact on COL. Be mindful that what you write will be public for a long time — protect your privacy, the privacy and reputation of co-workers and other colleagues as well as COL's privacy and reputation.
3. As a normal practice and especially if you blog about COL or a COL-related matter, identify yourself — your name and, when relevant, your role at COL. You must make it clear in your writing that you are speaking for yourself and not on behalf of COL, but still be careful to uphold COL values. You may even add a statement like this if you are not entirely sure of

¹ <http://www.ibm.com/blogs/zz/en/guidelines.html>

² <http://intranet.col.org/jahia/jahia/pid/211>

your view in relation to the corporate position: “This post is my own view and does not necessarily represent COL’s position, strategy or opinion.”

4. Respect copyright, fair use and relevant laws (these might apply differently in different countries). What you publish on the Internet will be indexed by search engines and stored in many archives. You cannot simply retract what you publish.
5. Don’t provide COL’s or another person’s confidential or other proprietary information. Ask permission to publish or report on conversations that are meant to be private or internal to COL, or one of its partners. If you plan to publish photographs that include recognisable images of people, first get the needed permission to have their picture published on the Internet.
6. Respect your audience and co-workers. Don’t run down the work of colleagues or other organisations; focus on the positive aspects of COL’s work and your potential contribution. Never use ethnic slurs, personal insults, obscenity (“flaming” other people or organisations is not acceptable), and show proper consideration for others’ privacy and for topics that may be considered objectionable or inflammatory – such as politics and religion.
7. Don’t pick fights. When you see misrepresentations made about COL, you may use your blog, join someone else’s or another appropriate, contributory site – to point that out. Discuss this with the Communications Manager or Senior Management before getting embroiled in a heated online debate. If you respond, always do so with respect and with the facts. Avoid public arguments or “brawls”. Don’t try to settle scores or goad others into seeing things your way. In any discussion, make sure that what you are saying is factually (and legally) correct. Find out who else is blogging on the topic, and cite them.
8. Be the first to correct your own mistakes, and don’t alter previously posted material without indicating that you have done so. Be respectful of the opinions and values of others.
9. Try to add value. Don’t post frivolous blogs or replies to discussions; provide worthwhile information with a mature and broad perspective.

Conclusion

Remember that COL is an Intergovernmental, Commonwealth organisation whose staff, partners and Governments reflect a diverse set of customs, values and points of view. Don't be afraid to be yourself, but do so, always respecting the viewpoint of others.

Don't forget your “day job” at COL. You should make sure that blogging does not interfere with your COL work responsibilities. Our primary job is to serve Commonwealth Governments, not to run a private vanity-press over the Internet. Always respond or interject in a way that will support COL’s public image and contribute to enhancing understanding of the corporate approach on any matter. Consult your supervisor, a member of Senior Management or the Communications Manager along with applicable COL policies and procedures to be sure of the approach to take.