| CONFIDENTIAL ISSUES NOTE | |
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| Ministry: Technology, Innovation and Citizens' Services<br><br>Date: April 27, 2016<br><br>Minister Responsible: Hon. Amrik Virk<br><br>Created by Government Communications and Public Engagement | **Instant Messaging and Chat Rooms – Slack and Skype** |

## ADVICE AND RECOMMENDED RESPONSE:

- Instant messages, chat rooms and video conferencing calls are commonly used by organizations as a cost-effective option for communicating – no different than a phone call or an in-person meeting.

- Government employees are required to keep complete and accurate records sufficient to document key policy decisions and work activities. For example, minutes taken following a weekly meeting.

- Documenting these decisions ensures that information is kept for operational and accountability purposes and is available to the public, subject to limited exceptions, under Freedom of Information legislation.

If asked about privacy or security:

- Government is committed to strong privacy and security controls.

- All ministries are required to conduct a Privacy Impact Assessment when they use any new IT system or when there is a material change to an existing IT system.

- Privacy Impact Assessments are underway for Slack and Skype.

- Employees in the public service are required to use only IT systems, downloaded software or applications that have been approved for government use.

If asked whether employees can use government email to sign up for Slack:

- Employees are permitted to use government email to sign up for social networking, as long as the purpose is for government business.

- The B.C. Government has clear policy guidelines for employees that govern the use of government email accounts and we expect these policies to be followed.

- BC Public Service employees who comment on social media or collaboration sites in the course of their work must adhere to the BC Public Service professional Standards of Conduct.

- The vast majority of BC Public Service employees follow these guidelines.

## If asked about employees who do not follow the guidelines:

- **Employees who are found to have inappropriately used IT resources may be subject to disciplinary action.**

## BACKGROUND:

A series of FOI requests have been made to various ministries requesting records pertaining to the use of Slack for government operations. Slack is a web-based instant messaging application designed to support communication and collaboration between teams. There is also an FOI request to MTICS for a list of employees in government who have Skype loaded onto their work stations.

Both of these requests may lead to questions regarding the use of instant messaging applications or chat rooms (collaboration platforms) for government business and whether or not appropriate records of government decision making are being captured and retained.

The Office of the Chief Information Officer (OCIO) confirms that Skype is approved for government use. Government employees also have the ability to use the Microsoft Lync application, which is pre-installed on government workstations, to be used to connect directly with public Skype users.

Privacy Impact Assessments (which are held centrally with Ministry of Finance) and Security Threat and Risk Assessments (these may be held centrally or by individual ministries) are required for the use of any new IT system supported by government.

Privacy Impact Assessments on Skype and Slack are underway at the Ministry of Finance. s.15
s.15

As outlined in the OCIO's Appropriate Use Policy, allegations of inappropriate access, collection or inappropriate use of government IT resources are investigated on a case-by-case basis. If an investigation determines IT resources have been used inappropriately, employees may be subject to discipline.

MTICS FOI **CTZ-2016-61358, applicant type media,** requests a list of email addresses (government and non-government) registered with a Slack team called 2o17. No responsive records have been found in relation to this request. The OCIO does not know if there are government employees registered for a Slack team called 2o17. The OCIO would be required to launch an investigation in order to get additional information.

Slack is promoted as a messaging application designed for teams, providing private channels for the exchange of sensitive information, as well as a direct messaging function. The company offers free and paid-subscription options. Because Slack's data is held in the United States, there would be privacy and security concerns if sensitive data is stored there.

MTICS FOI **CTZ-2016-61317, applicant type media**, requests records pertaining to the desktop and mobile application Skype; specifically for a list of government employees with workstation installations of Skype. Responsive records include 34 pages listing the name and public-sector organization of staff who have Skype loaded onto their workstations. It is unknown when Skype was loaded onto workstations and whether it is used.

Skype is a Microsoft product that is pre-loaded with Windows 8.1 and distributed with Surface Pro 3, which is used by many employees throughout the public service. Skype provides text, voice and video applications.

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