



Privacy Impact Assessment  
for the

Department of Homeland Security Our Border Network

August 10, 2009

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## Abstract

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Public Affairs, in coordination with the Office of International Affairs plans to use the social networking site Ning.com to facilitate the creation of a “civic network” focused on southwest border issues. To become a member of the DHS network hosted by Ning, individuals must be a member of Ning.com which requires the collection of certain personally identifiable information (PII). Although Ning is not collecting this PII on behalf of DHS, DHS will be able to review PII as part of its participation in the social network; therefore, DHS conducted this privacy impact assessment (PIA) to identify and mitigate privacy issues associated with the administration of a DHS-created social media network hosted on a non-DHS platform.

## Introduction

In accordance with President Obama’s Transparency and Open Government Memorandum,<sup>1</sup> which directs Federal agencies to harness new technologies (i.e., social networking tools) to engage the public, The Office of Public Affairs (OPA), in coordination with the Office of International Affairs (OIA), plan to use the social networking site Ning.com to facilitate the creation of a “civic network” focused on southwest border issues (herein “Our Border”). Our Border will enable a diverse population of stakeholders to remotely engage in a wide-ranging policy discourse on border-related matters. In addition, Our Border will serve as a catalyst for informed policy debates and thoughtful discourse amongst interested communities. To achieve these goals, this site will allow the sharing of information, ideas, and solutions, where geographic barriers would have previously rendered such dialogue impossible.

DHS will use Our Border to facilitate discussion and event creation, communicate DHS policy, host DHS photos and videos, engage users in dialogue, as well as feature individual and group accomplishments. DHS will accomplish these goals by using its network to connect individuals, law enforcement, civic organizations, interest groups, activists, DHS employees, and elected officials. The network will reside on Ning.com and will be open to any individual who wishes to join. DHS is responsible for administration of Our Border based on the agreed upon terms of service with Ning, content, moderation of individual user created content, and promotion of the network through its public and internal communications channels. DHS plans to roll out certain Ning features (described in the Feature Options section) on Our Border in a phased approach. Initially, Our Border will enable DHS to facilitate discussion forums, and disseminate other DHS-approved content such as photos and videos. Additional features such as real time chat and the ability for users to post content and initiate discussion forums will be rolled out in the future. This PIA will be updated prior to the roll-out of additional features. The following sections of this PIA describe the privacy issues related to the creation and continued administration of Our Border.

### Creation of the Our Border Network

DHS created Our Border which can be found at <http://ourborder.ning.com> on the Ning platform. Ning enables registered users to create, join, or browse social networks built on its platform. DHS selected Ning because Ning offers a range of customizable features and appropriate privacy and moderation functions along with access to over 30 million registered Ning users.

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<sup>1</sup> [Office of Management and Budget, Transparency and Open Government Memorandum for the Heads of Executive Departments and Agencies, 74 Fed. Reg. 4685 \(Jan. 21, 2009\).](#)



There are two moderation/privacy settings for establishing a network on the Ning platform: “public” and “private.” The public option allows any registered Ning user to view and join the network. The private option removes the network from all Ning users’ view, and users must be invited to join and see the network. DHS will use the public option, so that anyone who visits Our Border will be able to see the information posted, and any registered Ning user will be able to join Our Border. Non-registered Ning users will be able to view all the material posted on Our Border, including depending on the privacy settings set by the individual, profile information. DHS employees responsible for Our Border post as part of their official duties and other individuals who are in the Ning network.

In order to function as a fully interactive social network, when a user joins Our Border, DHS has put in place settings so that the only information DHS will readily be able to view is the user’s, name which serves as the user’s “Ning ID,” associated posting and, if provided, gender, location, and photograph. DHS (as well as other Ning users) may have access to additional profile information that a user voluntarily provides when establishing their Ning account including date of birth and full name.<sup>2</sup> As a practical matter, DHS cannot disable the feature that enables Ning users to view the profile of other Ning users. Nevertheless, DHS employees administering Our Border will not actively collect or gather personally PII from user profiles and place it in a DHS controlled Privacy Act system of records. DHS will post its own content and will review all content before user created information is posted to Our Border. DHS will follow the DHS Content and Privacy Policies (See appendix 1) that are clearly posted on Our Border.

## Feature Options

Ning provides a number of “Feature Options”; DHS will roll out these options and update this PIA as it does so. As the network administrator, DHS will control which features are used on Our Border (described below). There are a range of privacy and moderation controls available as well.

1. Forums: DHS will create topical forums and open discussions on Our Border. Users will not have the ability to create forums on the main page, but will be able to post responses in forums that DHS establishes. The Office of International Affairs (OIA) will create and the Office of Public Affairs (OPA) will approve of new forums. DHS will moderate these forums based on the approved content policy posted at Our Border. OIA and OPA will have joint authority to approve each response before it is posted. DHS will not use the forums feature to collect any PII.
2. Groups: DHS network administrators and individual members can create groups that exist as sub-groups of Our Border. Users can then join or be invited to join these smaller groups, which feature the same discussion forums that exist on the main network. Group administrators can create forums in these smaller groups, but they will not appear on the main page of the network. Group administrators and/or network administrators can determine the moderation and privacy settings for the forums. DHS will launch Our Border with preset groups created by OIA/OPA that individual users can join. DHS will moderate these smaller groups with the same policy that DHS uses to moderate the larger network. Users will not be able to create individual groups at the outset (DHS may revisit the issue of individually-created groups in the future). DHS will not use the groups feature to collect or publish any PII.

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<sup>2</sup> DHS does not require the collection of this information to participate in Our Border. Rather, this information is collected by Ning and provided voluntarily by users.



3. Blog: DHS will publish a blog on the main site of Our Border. OIA will provide content for the site and OPA will approve content. DHS will use the blog to feature individual accomplishments, highlight internal network activity on sub-group pages, publish approved messages from DHS principals, and announce new and approved initiatives and policies. DHS will use the approved Content Policy to moderate and post user content on the blog posts. DHS will not use the blog to collect or publish any PII.
4. Chat: DHS plans to launch this feature in the future, but will not use the chat feature upon creation of the network. As a live chat is difficult to moderate and control in real time, DHS will have to address the moderation policy with respect to the chat feature prior to its launch. This PIA will be updated prior to the chat feature being launched.
5. Music: Network and group administrators can use this feature to upload music files to the network. DHS does not plan to use this feature at the current time, and it will not be allowed anywhere on the network. Should DHS decide to incorporate this feature in the future, this PIA will be updated prior to its launch.
6. Activity: The activity feed displays recent member activity on the network. It shows only the user name and the associated activity (e.g. DHSborderfan just updated his profile picture). DHS will not use the information in the activity feed unless it directly relates to authorized activities on Our Border. DHS uses this functionality to understand activity and promote further engagement on the site. DHS does not use this function to collect PII from their user profile.
7. Members: The members feature displays the list of current Our Border members and a profile picture, if that member has uploaded one. Users can click on the user's name or picture, which directs them to that user's profile page and displays information that the user chooses to post, as well as the user's recent activity. The user has the option of displaying his/her location, name, gender, and various information about that user's interests. The default settings for every user conceal any PII. However, a user could conceivably post his/her email address or other PII on his/her profile. DHS has no control over what a user posts on his/her profile, and DHS does not plan to monitor individual profiles for inappropriate content, as that content is not displayed in any way on the main network page, nor is it available in the members section until you visit that member's profile page. Ning.com is responsible for monitoring inappropriate content on specific user pages.
8. Photos: The photos feature allows DHS to post photos on the main page of Our Border as a slide show. OIA/OPA will publish only approved photos. Users will not be able to post photos without approval from OIA/OPA, and no PII will be collected or distributed with this feature.
9. Videos: The videos feature allows DHS to post photos on the main page of Our Border. OIA/OPA will publish only approved videos. Users will not be able to post videos without approval from OIA/OPA, and no PII will be collected or distributed with this feature.
10. Events: The events feature allows network administrators, group administrators, and individual users to create events to publicize on Our Border. Users are asked for a name, an image, a description, an event type, time and date information, and a location. Event creators can determine the privacy options for each event. The event can be made public for all network users, or private, so that only invited users can RSVP and see event details. Event creators can also disable the RSVP



feature and hide the guest list. These options all exist on the event creation page. OIA or OPA will approve each event that is posted to the network, and will moderate based on the comment policy for relevance and appropriate content.

11. Badges: The badge feature allows the DHS network administrator to create virtual badge that users can post on their profiles for other Ning.com users to see. DHS will create a badge that says, "I am a member of Our Border. Join me." Users can post this badge on their profiles for other users to see and then join. No PII will be collected or published with this feature.

## Joining Our Border

Individual users can join Our Border simply by clicking the "join" link. Each individual must be a registered Ning user to join. Registration is required by Ning's terms of service and DHS cannot modify this aspect of the terms. No PII is collected or published by DHS and though profiles may be available for DHS to view with respect to any users who join Our Border. As stated, DHS will not actively collect or gather PII from user profiles and place it in a DHS controlled Privacy Act system of records. The information contained on each profile page is provided at the discretion of the user and Ning is responsible for moderation of these profiles.

For Ning to maintain Our Border, it requires an email address and a date of birth<sup>3</sup> from the DHS user. Providing the city and state location of that user are optional. Once the DHS user provides this information, the DHS user will select a password and will then be granted access to the Ning site and the ability to create a new network on Ning. Ning will ask for a network name and DHS address (e.g. ourborder.ning.com). The next page in the creation of the network asks for a description of the network and the default privacy setting DHS wishes to use. DHS will set the privacy settings to public to enable any registered Ning user to join Our Border and any individual to view the content on Our Border.

DHS will only provide Ning with the information and content that is posted on the public network and the information necessary to create individual accounts. Each DHS user will be responsible for creating and maintaining his/her own account on Ning.com. OIA/OPA will not collect any PII for account creation. The content that DHS posts on Ning.com will all be approved by OIA/OPA before posting.

DHS will designate DHS employees who will act in their official capacity, to review and respond to content and other postings on Our Border. DHS employees acting in their official capacity must provide their full name, which is used as the Ning ID, and date of birth. DHS employees in their official capacity and with the approval of OIA/OPA may choose a more generic user name than their full name, such as DHSborderfan. DHS employees acting in their official capacity may choose to post additional information to their profile, but this information will be subject to same OIA/OPA approval process before posting. DHS employees acting in their official capacity may not collect or maintain PII related to other users on the network. PII at a minimum includes name, date of birth, gender, or photos. DHS employees acting in their official capacity may not collect any other information from the social network that is not directly germane to the mission of Our Border.

DHS employees who access Our Border outside of their official capacity may not represent themselves as providing the official DHS position. DHS employees may not release or discuss any non-public government information. This implies that employees are free to discuss all public government information, share all public information, and refer users to governmental websites for additional guidance

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<sup>3</sup> Ning collects age in order to ensure compliance with the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA).



if it is available. An employee acting in a personal, non-official capacity, may not use his/her government email account for Our Border. An employee acting in a personal, non-official capacity, may not send Our Border correspondence to government email account for any purpose including but not limited to: invitations, chatting, or archiving.

DHS will not actively collect information displayed in the public side of the network and on user's profile pages. Ning makes available to all network administrators all profile information related to users who have signed up to a particular network. DHS does not have a need for such detailed information and will not collect or request such information from Ning. Further, users who post PII on their profiles do so of their own volition, and it is Ning.com's responsibility to monitor profiles for inappropriate content in line with their terms of service.

The other information that DHS receives from Ning including the comments and content posted by users, will be used to inform DHS on relevant issues and policy. PII will not be collected as part of this program. No guarantees will be issued on the use of such content and information in changing or creating Departmental policy. DHS will encourage use of Our Border to further discussion among the previously stated groups and individuals. This is the primary purpose for the information gathered on the site. Only individuals in OPA/OIA will have administrator rights, and approvals will run through the New Media Specialist in OPA and a senior staffer in OIA.

## **Persistent Cookies**

Guidance issued by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) prohibits Federal agency use of "persistent cookies" and other web tracking technologies on Federal agency web sites unless there is a compelling need to use the technology and the use is approved by the head of the agency.<sup>4</sup> The Guidance also provides that if the technology is used, Federal agencies must post clear notice in the agency's privacy policy of the nature of the information collected; the purpose and use for the information; whether and to whom the information will be disclosed; and the privacy safeguards applied to the information collected.<sup>5</sup> Accordingly, DHS obtained the approval of the Secretary.

According to Ning's Privacy Policy, Ning uses persistent cookies and other web tracking technologies on Our Border.<sup>6</sup> Ning persistent cookies and other web tracking technologies may collect the following information: PII such as name or e-mail address, IP address, unique device or user identification, type of browser, type of system, the content of and the pages that an individual accesses on the Ning platform, and the page from which an individual may have navigated to the Ning platform. DHS will not have access to the PII contained in the persistent cookies.

Ning uses persistent cookies and other web tracking technologies to recognize an individual's Ning ID and to store references to that identification and "session validators" on an individual's hard drive. Ning also includes web beacons in email messages to users which assist Ning with determining whether those messages were delivered and opened. Lastly, Ning uses persistent cookies and other web tracking

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<sup>4</sup> See OMB, Executive Office of the President, OMB Memorandum No. 03-22, *OMB Guidance for Implementing the Privacy Provisions of the E-Government Act of 2002*, Attachment A § III (D)(2)(a)(v)(1)(a) (September 26, 2003) (prohibiting Federal agency use of persistent cookies and other web tracking technologies except that agency heads may approve the use of persistent tracking technology for a compelling need).

<sup>5</sup> *Id.* at § III (D)(2)(a)(v)(1)(b).

<sup>6</sup> Ning's Privacy Policy can be found at <http://about.ning.com/privacy.php>.



technologies to administer the Ning platform and to provide services that may be tailored to users.

According to Ning's Privacy Policy, Ning does not disclose information contained in persistent cookies to third-parties. However, Ning's Privacy Policy also provides that users of Ning social networking platforms may add Third-Party Applications that set and use persistent cookies to collect information about users and that Ning does not have control over those persistent cookies. To help protect privacy, DHS will not add any Third-Party Applications to Our Border and is prohibiting its members from adding Third-Party Applications to the platform.

### **Inappropriate Content outside Our Border**

As stated above, DHS will use the approved content policy posted on Our Border to moderate content, posts, and groups on Our Border. DHS is launching Our Border with a limited set of features that provides DHS with full control of what is posted on its network. Ning.com also has two "report abuse" functions. One allows a user to report abuse to the DHS network administrator, and the second allows a user to report abuse to Ning.com. DHS will work with Ning.com on any suspected abuse issues, and will resolve them on a case-by-case basis.

## **Fair Information Practice Principles (FIPPs)**

The Privacy Act of 1974 articulates concepts of how the Federal government should treat individuals and their information and imposes duties upon Federal agencies regarding the collection, use, dissemination, and maintenance of personally identifiable information. The Homeland Security Act of 2002 Section 222(2) states that the Chief Privacy Officer shall assure that information is handled in full compliance with the fair information practices as set out in the Privacy Act of 1974.

In response to this obligation, the DHS Privacy Office developed a set of Fair Information Practice Principles (FIPPs) from the underlying concepts of the Privacy Act to encompass the full breadth and diversity of the information and interactions of DHS. The FIPPs account for the nature and purpose of the information being collected in relation to DHS's mission to preserve, protect, and secure.

DHS conducts Privacy Impact Assessments on both programs and information technology systems, pursuant to the E-Government Act of 2002 Section 208 and the Homeland Security Act of 2002 Section 222. Given that Our Border is a social media implementation hosted on Ning.com rather than a particular information technology system, this PIA is conducted as it relates to the DHS construct of the Fair Information Principles. This PIA examines the privacy impact of DHS's use of the Ning social networking platform as it relates to the Fair Information Practice Principles.

In conducting this PIA, DHS identified the following privacy risks: 1) individuals may not be aware that DHS is reviewing all the information posted on Our Border; 2) DHS will receive more PII than it needs to facilitate discussion about the border; 3) that PII may be posted to Our Border by users in the form of a posting or comment; and 4) the use of persistent cookies on Ning.com. DHS has mitigated these risks with the following strategies 1) DHS has clearly marked the site and placed links to the DHS Our Border Content and Privacy Policy; 2) DHS has minimized the data that it actively collects; 3) DHS has explicitly stated through notice in its DHS Our Border Content and Privacy policy that any content with PII will be rejected; and 4) DHS will not host third-party applications on Our Border and has obtained a waiver from the Secretary of Homeland Security authorizing the use of persistent cookies.



## 1. Principle of Transparency

*Principle: DHS should be transparent and provide notice to the individual regarding its collection, use, dissemination, and maintenance of PII. Technologies or systems using PII must be described in a SORN and PIA, as appropriate. There should be no system the existence of which is a secret.*

The Department is using Ning to host a “civic network” focused on southwest border issues. Ning provides notice to individual users during account creation. Notice is reiterated on Ning.com’s posted Privacy Policy. DHS provides notice to the user when a user joins the network and has a link on all pages with the DHS Our Border Content and Privacy Policies.

DHS employees who are assigned to work on the DHS-sponsored Ning Network are provided specific guidance on how they may conduct themselves on Ning. For example, employees may post only information that is approved by OPA. This requirement includes if DHS employees wish to post more information than required to his/her profile. All DHS employees who are working on Our Border in their official capacity are provided training about the rules noted above in the introduction and are provided a copy of this PIA.

If a DHS employee chooses to sign up to Ning in their personal capacity, DHS has provided basic guidance as noted above in the introduction.

The privacy risk associated with Our Border is that individuals will not realize or understand that DHS is viewing all interaction on its web site and that it is moderating the interaction. In order to mitigate this risk, DHS is posting on its web site its own Content and Privacy Policies,. All users upon joining will be provided the Our Border Content and Privacy Policies. These documents will also be on a prominent link on every page, so individuals are able to review them. Additionally, DHS branding will be across the network so it is clear that DHS is sponsoring the network and not a private organization.

A second privacy risk associated with Our Border is that Ning uses persistent cookies on its website. Persistent cookies can contain PII, as well as information from a previous session that the user may be unaware has been tracked. Privacy risks associated with the use of persistent cookies are more acute when the persistent cookie is placed by a third-party because the individual does not have a direct relationship with the third party. When using the Ning network, third party persistent cookies may be placed on a user’s computer when a third-party application is added to a social networking platform. To mitigate this risk, DHS is prohibiting members from adding third-party applications to Our Border. DHS is further mitigating the risks associated with the use of persistent cookies by providing clear notice of the type of information being collected, the purpose and use of the information being collected, and the privacy safeguards applied to information collected on the Ning social networking platform in the Our Border Content and Privacy Policy. Lastly, in accordance with OMB Guidance which prohibits Federal agency use of persistent cookies and other web tracking technologies unless there is a compelling need to use the technology and the use is approved by the head of the agency, DHS obtained the approval of the Secretary of Homeland Security for the use of this technology on Our Border.

In addition to increase awareness and transparency of DHS’s activities, DHS is issuing this Privacy Impact Assessment to provide the public with additional information about its use of the Ning network.



## 2. Principle of Individual Participation

*Principle: DHS should involve the individual in the process of using PII. DHS should, to the extent practical, seek individual consent for the collection, use, dissemination, and maintenance of PII and should provide mechanisms for appropriate access, correction, and redress regarding DHS's use of PII.*

The concept behind Our Border is that individuals are able to interact directly with DHS and provide input on issues related to DHS. Individuals have control of their information to the extent that they control what information they post to their Ning profile. Individuals may change their own privacy settings. Any information the individual user posts is voluntary, the only information required by the system to post content is the Ning ID. Individual users are encouraged to interact with the network, submitting relevant content and reviewing substance provided by others, including the Department.

DHS employees will be asked to provide the required Ning registration information of Ning ID, date of birth, email, and password. Date of birth is collected to ensure compliance with the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA). The email address is used to verify the account creation, and contact the user if they select that option. Any additional information posted to the profile of a DHS employee acting in their official capacity must be approved by OPA and OIA.

DHS employees who are not acting in their official capacity may not use their DHS email address to register on Ning.

## 3. Principle of Purpose Specification

*Principle: DHS should specifically articulate the authority which permits the collection of PII and specifically articulate the purpose or purposes for which the PII is intended to be used.*

OPA, in conjunction with OIA are using the Ning network pursuant to 6 U.S.C. § 112 and 5 U.S.C. §§ 301 & 302. These statutes provide the appointment authority for the Assistant Secretaries of Public Affairs and International Affairs, as well as outlining the Secretary's broad discretion in delegating authority for conducting the mission of DHS under 6 U.S.C. § 111. OIA and OPA's authorities to engage in this social networking initiative are inherent in the execution of their duties and responsibilities as generally set forth in 6 U.S.C. § 459 and DHS Management Directive 2230, respectively. Furthermore, the Secretary has outlined five priority responsibilities of DHS: guarding against terrorism; securing our borders; enforcing our immigration laws; improving our readiness for, response to, and recovery from disasters; and unifying the Department. And, this particular social networking initiative directly supports mission accomplishment in securing our borders and enforcing our immigration laws.

Further, utilizing social media technology to disseminate information to and communicate with the public aligns with the President's January 21, 2009 Memorandum For the Heads of Executive Departments and Agencies on Transparency and Open Government.

## 4. Principle of Data Minimization

*Principle: DHS should only collect PII that is directly relevant and necessary to accomplish the specified purpose(s) and only retain PII for as long as is necessary to fulfill the specified purpose(s). PII*



*should be disposed of in accordance with DHS records disposition schedules as approved by the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA).*

In order to function as a fully interactive social network, when a user joins Our Border, DHS has put in place settings so that the only information DHS will readily be able to view is the user's Ning ID," and associated posting and, if provided, gender, location, and photograph. DHS (as well as other Ning users) may have access to additional profile information that a user voluntarily provides when establishing their Ning account including date of birth and full name. As a practical matter, DHS cannot disable the feature that enables Ning users to view the profile of other Ning users. Nevertheless, DHS employees administering Our Border will not actively collect or gather PII from user profiles and place it in a DHS controlled Privacy Act system of records.

Individuals can control how much additional information is provided to DHS by changing the privacy settings on their Ning account. The registration information will not be given to DHS, DHS will see only the information the user has made available to the public. DHS has stated that it does not want individuals to post PII. The Our Border Content Policy states this explicitly and because DHS controls reviews all information prior to its posting, no PII will be posted.

DHS is not maintaining these records rather Ning is retaining these records. Accordingly, the retention of Ning profile information is defined by Ning.

## **5. Principle of Use Limitation**

*Principle: DHS should use PII solely for the purpose(s) specified in the notice. Sharing PII outside the Department should be for a purpose compatible with the purpose for which the PII was collected.*

While the Ning platform allows network administrators to download profile information for individuals signed up to Our Border, DHS has no need for this PII and will not make use of this capability. DHS will review only information that is directly relevant to the mission of Our Border and has trained its employees accordingly. DHS will not share information outside of DHS because it is not collecting any PII. The individual user creates a Ning ID, to be used when the individual joins the network, and utilizes the network functions. The only information DHS will readily be able to view is the user's name, which serves as the user's "Ning ID," and associated posting and, if provided, gender, location, and photograph. In addition, DHS explicitly states that no PII may be posted to the web site as part of its moderation policy and rejects any content that do have PII.

Ning provides network administrators with the opportunity to download all registration information of users of their Network. DHS is declining to use this option for Our Border and will review only the Ning ID that is published when an individual provides content on Our Border.

## **6. Principle of Data Quality and Integrity**

*Principle: DHS should, to the extent practical, ensure that PII is accurate, relevant, timely, and complete, within the context of each use of the PII.*

Individual users are responsible for the information posted in their Ning profile. DHS does not collect this information and the accuracy of this information is not relevant to the purpose of Our Border.



With respect to the content posted to the network by the Department, all content will be reviewed and approved by the OPA and OIA. All content on the main page will be posted by the Department. Individual users can create subpages, where the content is not sponsored by the Department and no assumptions about the accuracy of this information will be made, but will be subject to the Our Border Content and Privacy Policies.

The Department retains the discretion to determine which content from individual users it will post and which it will not. The Department will not post content that contains personal attacks of any kind; refers to DHS personnel, to include contractors, by name; contains offensive terms that target specific ethnic or racial groups; vulgar language; or partisan political speech in violation of the Hatch Act. The Department will not post content that is spam, that is clearly off topic or that promotes services or products.

## 7. Principle of Security

*Principle: DHS should protect PII (in all forms) through appropriate security safeguards against risks such as loss, unauthorized access or use, destruction, modification, or unintended or inappropriate disclosure.*

Ning uses industry standard security measures to protect the loss, misuse, and alteration of PII in their control. However, by Ning agreeing to host this DHS capability, the Ning network becomes a potential target of advanced, persistent attackers that will attempt to penetrate the Ning systems, most likely not targeting Ning today, but dealt with at DHS every day. Ning will disclose current security controls in place used to protect information systems hosting DHS information, including but not limited to AV, firewalls, patch management, IDS, and IPS. The Ning security team will collaborate with the DHS SOC when the service is first contracted, and discuss additional security measures, incident response procedures, contact information, and define procedures to deal with serious incidents such as classified spills and intrusions. DHS reserves the right to block DHS users from the site any time at its sole discretion.



## 8. Principle of Accountability and Auditing

*Principle: DHS should be accountable for complying with these principles, providing training to all employees and contractors who use PII, and should audit the actual use of PII to demonstrate compliance with these principles and all applicable privacy protection requirements.*

The Department does not receive any personally identifiable information from Ning.com. To ensure only appropriate content is posted on the network, the moderators from the Department receive training, and will receive additional security training before being provided access to the Ning website from DHS. All members of OPA and OIA have taken privacy training. The Department has established policies and procedures regarding the content on the main page the Department controls, and policies for moderation of the content submitted by individual users.

## Responsible Officials

Program Manager:  
Graves Spindler  
Office of Public Affairs  
Department of Homeland Security

## Approval Signature

Original signed and on file with the DHS Privacy Office

John Kropf  
Acting Chief Privacy Officer  
Department of Homeland Security



## Appendix 1

### Our Borders Content and Privacy Policies

#### Content Policy

We welcome your comments on postings and other content at Our Border. Comments submitted to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Our Border network will be reviewed before posting.

This is a moderated network, and the Department retains the discretion to determine which content it will post and which it will not. We expect all contributors to be respectful. We will not post content that contains personal attacks of any kind; refers to DHS personnel, to include contractors, by name; contains offensive terms that target specific ethnic or racial groups; contains vulgar language; or contains partisan political speech in violation of the Hatch Act. We will not post comments that are spam that are clearly off topic, or that promote or endorse services or products. The Department reserves the right to modify this policy at any time.

We will make our best effort to promptly post content that is consistent with the Content Policy, but given the need to manage federal resources, moderating and posting of content will occur only during regular business hours, Monday through Friday. Content submitted outside of business hours will be reviewed and posted as quickly as possible. To protect your own privacy and the privacy of others, please do not include phone numbers, email addresses, or other personally identifying information in the body of your content.

For DHS employees acting in their official capacity, content posted to their Ning profile must be approved by DHS.

For the benefit of robust discussion, we ask that comments remain on-topic. Department leadership will discuss other topics in the future.

The Department does not guarantee or warrant that any information posted by individuals other than those acting in their official DHS capacity on this network is correct, and disclaims any liability for any loss or damage resulting from reliance on any such information. The Department may not be able to verify, does not warrant or guarantee, and assumes no liability for anything posted on this network by any person other than those acting in their official DHS capacity.

#### **What This Network Is Not**

- This network is not to be used to report criminal activity. If you have information for law enforcement, please contact your local police or [see Report Incidents](#). If this is a emergency, please dial 911.



- Do not send in questions or status inquiries about your specific immigration or citizenship case or questions about your passport or visa. [Contact USCIS directly regarding citizenship, and the State Department regarding international travel.](#)
- This is a social network, not a substitute channel for services or general questions. [See "Contact Us" on www.dhs.gov, to get help from the Department and components.](#)
- Do not submit or post unsolicited proposals or other business inquiries to this network. This network is not to be used for contracting or commercial business. <https://dhsonline.dhs.gov/portal/jhtml/dc/sfi.jhtml?doid=14235>
- Media questions will not be posted. Media should contact the DHS Office of Public Affairs at <https://contact.dhs.gov/DynaForm.aspx?FormID=press> Any opinions expressed here, except as specifically noted, are those of the individual authors or commenters and do not necessarily represent the views or policies of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

Thank you for reviewing the Department of Homeland Security Our Border Network comment policy.

## Privacy Policy

### Authority

Consistent with the President's Memorandum for the Heads of Executive Departments and Agencies on *Transparency and Open Government*, DHS is using Ning to host the Our Border network. The DHS Office of International Affairs (OIA) and Office of Public Affairs's (OPA) authorities to engage in this social networking initiative are inherent in the execution of these Components' duties and responsibilities as generally set forth in 6 U.S.C. § 459 and DHS Management Directive 2230, respectively. Furthermore, the Secretary of Homeland Security has outlined five priority responsibilities of DHS: guarding against terrorism; securing our borders; enforcing our immigration laws; improving our readiness for, response to, and recovery from disasters; and unifying the Department. This particular social networking initiative directly supports mission accomplishment in securing our borders and enforcing our immigration laws.

### Purpose

DHS Public Affairs, in coordination with the Office of International Affairs, is using the social networking site Ning.com to facilitate the creation and hosting of a "civic network" focused on southwest border issues named *Our Border*. DHS will use *Our Border* to facilitate discussion and event creation, communicate DHS policy, host DHS photos and videos, engage users in dialogue, as well as feature individual and group accomplishments. *Our Border* will connect individuals, law enforcement, civic organizations, interest groups, activists, DHS employees, and elected officials. The network will reside on Ning.com, and will be open to any individual who wishes to join. DHS is responsible for administration of *Our Border* based on the agreed upon terms of service with Ning.



All content on the main page and any subpages will be posted by the DHS moderator. Individuals wishing to join Ning will be required to provide name, email address, and date of birth. Ning collects this information to create an account. The Ning User ID is based upon the full name provided at the time of registration. The Ning User ID will be public along with the comments made on Our Border. Ning users control who may view their profile which may include personally identifiable information. For additional information about user privacy settings available on Ning, see the Ning [Privacy Policy](#).

DHS will be able to view all the personally identifiable information that a user makes available in their Ning profile, but DHS will not actively collect or place this information into a DHS controlled Privacy Act system of records.

***Participants are reminded that the Our Border is available to the general public. Participants should therefore not post personally identifiable information such as Social Security numbers or telephone numbers on this network. DHS reviews and moderates all submissions and, as noted above in the Content Policy, DHS will not post any content that appears to have personally identifiable information in it.***

### **Submission of information**

Submission of this information is strictly voluntary; however, if individuals fail to provide this information, they will not be able to create an account on Ning, and consequently will be unable to participate with Our Border.

### **Persistent Cookies**

According to Ning's Privacy Policy, Ning uses "persistent cookies" and other web tracking technologies on the DHS "Our Border" Social Networking Platform. Ning's Privacy Policy can be found at <http://about.ning.com/privacy.php>.

Ning "Persistent cookies" and other web tracking technologies may collect the following information: personally identifiable information such as name or e-mail address, IP address, unique device or user identification, type of browser, type of system, the content of and the pages that an individual accesses on the Ning Platform, and the page from which an individual may have navigated to the Ning Platform. ***DHS will not have access to the personally identifiable information contained in the "persistent cookies."***

Ning uses "persistent cookies" and other web tracking technologies to recognize an individual's Ning Identification and to store references to that identification and "session validators" on an individual's hard drive. Ning also includes web beacons in email messages to users which assist Ning with determining whether those messages were delivered and opened. Lastly, Ning uses "persistent cookies" and other web tracking technologies to administer the Ning Platform and to provide services that may be tailored to users of the Ning Social Networking Platform.



According to Ning's Privacy Policy, Ning does not disclose information contained in "persistent cookies" to third-parties. However, Ning's Privacy Policy also provides that users of Ning social networking platforms may add Third-Party Applications that set and use "persistent cookies" to collect information about users and that Ning does not have control over those "persistent cookies." ***To help protect privacy, DHS will not add any Third-Party Applications to the DHS "Our Border" Social Networking Platform and is prohibiting its members from adding Third-Party Applications to the platform.***

According to Ning's Privacy Policy, Ning uses industry standard security measures to protect against the loss and misuse of personally identifiable information under its control.

### **Disclosure**

When an individual user joins Our Border, their user name will be automatically added to the list of users in the group. When a user submits content, he consents to his Ning ID and the content being made public on the Our Border network. DHS will review all submissions based on the Comment Policy above. DHS will review only information that is directly relevant to the purpose of Our Border and has trained its employees accordingly. DHS will not share information outside of DHS because it is not collecting any personally identifiable information from Ning profiles. For additional information about how Ning may use or disclose your personally identifiable information, please review their [Privacy Policy](#)

### ***Accessing and Correcting Information:***

Individuals may change their own Ning privacy settings and update their profiles accordingly. Any information the individual user posts to Our Border is voluntary, the only information required by the system to post content is the Ning ID.