

ROP Organizing Tips- Email

Email has become one of the main ways we communicate with each other and with our members. Therefore we need to think strategically about how we use email as an organizing tool. The goal is to have messages read and used. The effectiveness of email in our organizing relies on leaders committed to building a reputation for short, relevant, and focused messages.

GENERAL TIPS

- *Think about the subject line.* Is it catchy? Descriptive? Personal? Leaving out the subject line or using a generic heading like “hello” or “how are you?” may make your reader think the message is spam or a virus and delete the message without reading it. A boring subject line like “next meeting,” or “funds needed” will only attract your most dedicated readers. Use something that will draw people in, like “Local Victory for Farmworker Rights!” or “Tracking ICE Activity.”
- *Make it short, but not too short.* Anything longer than one screen worth of text is probably too long for a message that goes out to a broad audience. But, don’t be so brief that your message is cryptic, or that only an insider will know what you’re talking about. Write your message so that the least informed person on your list will understand what you are saying or asking.
- *Be human.* Use warmth, personality, and your own colloquial style to make messages appealing and to help build relationships. Write like you’re talking to someone you care about, and your readers will respond. At ROP we call it being “chatty.”
- *Choose carefully.* Everyone is overloaded with information these days. Forwarding too many messages or bombarding people with information is likely to lead to your messages getting deleted.
- *Forward with care.* If you have something you need to forward, delete the Fwd: from the subject line, and cut and paste the text into a new message, so your reader doesn’t have to look past all the hash marks to read the subject. Delete any unnecessary info, especially other people’s names or email addresses. Try to put it into context: “Below you will find important information because...”

PERSONALIZED EMAILS

- *Volunteer Recruitment.* Asking someone directly for his or her help is much more effective than sending a message out to your whole list saying, “I need help.” It’s too easy for everyone to assume that someone else will step up.
- *Turnout.* In addition to more broad methods, such as announcements to your listserv and in the local paper, consider sending personal invitations to everyone on your list. You can use the same message for many people by cutting and pasting core text; just take the time to write a personal greeting. More time consuming, but also more effective.

INTERNAL LIST. This is a clear list of leaders vs. everyone connected to your organization.

- Good for committees and leadership who have specific tasks that require regular communication.
- Allows for private, internal conversations. This is helpful for internal business that may not be interesting or relevant to your larger base of supporters.



ORGANIZATIONAL LISTSERV This is a list of your group’s members and supporters that you use to share key information about the group’s activities.

- Messages should be limited to information specific to the mission and purpose of the group. Limited to no more than a few messages per week or a short weekly digest.
- Each message should reflect your group’s perspective and priorities. See it as the public voice of your organization, like a newsletter.
- Needs a volunteer or a small team to post to group, and review suggested messages (a moderator).
- Assume that most, but not all, people who get the messages will be familiar with your group. If you’re being effective, your messages will get forwarded. Make sure your organization’s contact info is on all the messages, with information on how to subscribe.

DISCUSSION LISTSERV This is the broadest group. Geared toward those seeking information to develop their analysis and with enough time to keep up with a larger number of messages.

- Great tool for sharing information and/or articles broadly.
- Good for discussion/debate, but debates can turn to arguments and turn off listeners.
- Quantity of emails can often cause people to drop off from the list.
- Best to have a moderator and guidelines, though this can be a time-consuming job.
- A simple way to eliminate a lot of unnecessary emails (like messages that say “Thanks Jane for that great email!”) is for moderator to set listserve settings to “reply to sender” as opposed to “reply to all members.”

