Broadcast Email Policy

Purpose

To establish the University’s basic policy and procedures related to Broadcast Electronic Email.

Applicability

This policy applies to all Boston University Broadcast Email and is governed by the Boston University Conditions of Use and Policy of Computing Ethics.

Policy Elements

1. Only messages that directly relate to university business will be allowed.

2. All Broadcast Email must be approved before it can be sent.

Approval is typically provided on a per-message basis, although blanket authorization may be
provided. The message audience determines the level of the individual or office from which approval must be obtained. A list of some populations and the individuals responsible for approving messages to those populations is provided on the Target Constituencies page.

3. Email sent to a population restricted to a single organizational unit requires the approval of the head of that unit.

For example, a message sent to all faculty in a college would require the approval of the dean of that college. Refer to the Target Constituencies page for more information.

4. Email sent to a population spanning two or more units requires written approval from someone with authority over each unit targeted.

A message sent to students in two colleges, for example, would require approval from the deans of both colleges or the Charles River or Medical Campus Provost. More broadly distributed email would require approval from a correspondingly higher authority. In the case of a message sent to all staff at the University, the President’s approval would be required. The Target Constituencies page identifies target groups and the approval required to send email to each.

There are two special cases in which approval can be granted by an office that does not have authority over all members of a recipient population that spans multiple organizational or academic units:

a. The target population has a specific relationship — typically a business relationship — with the sender and the message is related to that relationship. To illustrate the approval required, consider two sample cases: (1) email sent by the Office of Parking Services to participants in the MBTA monthly pass program, and (2) email sent by an academic program to all undergraduates. In the first case, the Office of Parking Services has a business relationship with MBTA pass subscribers, i.e., the office administers the pass program, and so approval to send a message related to the program would be required only from the head of Parking Services. In the second case, the academic program has no specific relationship with the target population and therefore would, according to the Target Constituencies page, require authorization from the Provost and the Vice President for Marketing and Communications.
b. A subscription mailing list is involved. These lists consist of individuals who wish to receive email pertaining to particular topics. By subscribing, list members are granting approval to the list owner to send them email related to the list topic.

5. Broadcast Email addressing issues that are controversial or otherwise likely to attract media attention requires coordination with the Office of Marketing and Communications.

A message addressing an issue that has already attracted or is likely to attract media coverage should be composed in a manner consistent with the University’s news releases and other statements regarding the matter. The Vice President for Marketing and Communications or designee will work with the sender to insure such consistency as well as a fair and accurate representation of the facts and the situation being discussed in the message. Examples of topics requiring this kind of coordination include the announcement of the appointment or departure of a dean, news about labor negotiations, or news that directly affects the surrounding communities.

6. Broadcast Email must not contain attachments.

Attachments present problems for several reasons: they may place a significant strain on system resources, thereby affecting other services and subscribers; the application programs necessary to open them, e.g., Word or Excel, are not universally available on recipient systems; and they are a potential distribution mechanism for computer viruses. See our information on formatting your message.

7. Format your Broadcast Email responsibly.

Despite the common use of HTML in email (most modern clients use HTML to carry out any of the formatting done while writing the message), it is important to know that sending formatted messages could result in display problems for some recipients. This is true because not all email programs process HTML messages the same way. In addition, while the number of people at the University who use email clients that are unable to display HTML is quite small, it is not zero.

Because HTML formatting is often a requirement, we have a page with helpful HTML formatting information and resources (restricted access) to assist you with your broadcast.
When sending HTML email, we also highly recommend including a plain-text copy (which will be sent by most modern mail clients by default) to reduce your message’s overall SPAM score and to ensure that recipients without HTML-capable email clients can still read your message.

8. Institutionally-generated recipient lists should be used whenever possible.

Institutional recipient lists are based on information stored in the University’s central databases. Lists are frequently created and/or updated; new lists are created on an as-needed basis, while existing lists are refreshed on a daily or weekly schedule. Locally-managed lists can fall out of date if they are not diligently maintained. If this happens, a message’s effectiveness can be reduced because it does not reach its intended audience.

9. Broadcast Email must be sent during off-hours.

To minimize impact on the institutional email system, broadcast messages are normally sent at non-peak times (weekday afternoons from 12:00 to 5:00 are considered to be peak times). Emergency messages, or those of extremely high importance, can be accommodated at other times as required. When they involve a target population larger than 100, messages sent via locally-managed recipient lists must adhere to the same timing considerations.

10. Broadcast Email must not display the namesAddresses to which the message is sent.

Recipient lists are automatically suppressed for email sent through institutional channels. Email sent using a local mailing list must not display the recipient namesAddresses, either. This is a matter of convenience for the recipients — messages prefaced with a list of hundreds or thousands of email addresses are difficult to read and may be ignored. A second consideration is the issue of confidentiality; many users are sensitive to not having their email addresses broadly distributed.

11. The sender and the approver share responsibility for evaluating both the appropriateness and the form of a message.

The individual or office with approval authority will make the final determination regarding
whether or not an email message may be sent. That determination should take the Broadcast Email Guidelines into account. A primary criterion for approval is that the message must be directly related to university business.

1. Although they are special cases, they still involve Broadcast Email and must therefore adhere to all other elements of the Broadcast Email policy.

2. Some selection criteria may require data that is not contained in the central University databases. In such cases, it will not be possible to build an institutional list and a local list should be used instead.

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