NIH Policy Manual

2803 - NIH Staff E-Mail List Policy
Issuing Office: CIT 402-4452
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1. **Explanation of Material Transmitted:** The NIH Staff E-Mail List Policy has been updated to clarify requirements and to ensure consistency with the HHS IRM Policy for Use of Broadcast Messages, Spamming, and Targeted Audiences (dated 1/8/01).

2. **Filing Instructions:**
   Remove: NIH Manual Chapter 2803 dated 12/7/99
   Insert: NIH Manual Chapter 2803, dated 11/13/01

A. Purpose

The purpose of the NIH-STAFF E-Mail List is to facilitate the communication of important mission-related information of interest to the broad NIH community.

B. Scope

The NIH-STAFF E-Mail List encompasses the entire NIH community of approximately 32,000 people. The creation of such a large volume of unsolicited e-mail involves significant transmission and usage costs, as well as a significant labor cost to read and process these messages. Further, it is recognized that an excessive use of this list could diminish its value as an effective channel of communication to convey critical information. For these reasons, screening of messages is required to assure that this resource is used prudently.

This policy applies to NIH-generated e-mail. It does not apply to HHS or other agency e-mail broadcasts approved by the Assistant Secretary for Budget, Technology, and Finance (ASBTF), which NIH is required to send to the NIH community. On occasion, NIH may be asked to distribute messages to NIH employees from other HHS Operating Divisions (OPDIVs). In accordance with the HHS IRM Policy for Use of Broadcast Messages, Spamming, and Targeted Audiences (dated January 8, 2001) http://www.hhs.gov/read/irmpolicy/0004.html, the requesting OPDIV's Chief Information Officer (CIO) or designated approving official will present the request to the NIH CIO or designated approving officials (NIH-STAFF List Moderators) who will determine if the subject is of sufficiently broad interest to the NIH community and meets the criteria set forth in the NIH policy. The NIH-STAFF List Policy is consistent with the HHS IRM Policy as far as what type of message is appropriate and what is not.

In times of local or national emergency, the NIH-STAFF List Moderators may choose to restrict usage of the NIH-Staff E-mail List to messages related to the emergency operations of NIH and the safety of NIH employees.

C. Who May Submit Messages?

-- NIH employees in fulfillment of their official duties if the message is of broad interest to the NIH community.

- Official representatives of NIH Chartered, Sanctioned, or Sponsored Organizations in support of goals related to the NIH mission.

- Employees from other HHS OPDIVs if the message has approval from their CIO or designated approving official and is of sufficiently broad interest to the NIH community.

D. Responsibility For Clearance – A Two Part Process

D1. IC Review or Other HHS OPDIV Review

NIH Executive Officers shall designate two Reviewing Officials http://list/LISTSERV_WEB/NIH-STAFF/Reviewing_Officials.htm to review and approve all messages generated from within their respective areas, including messages by any NIH chartered, sanctioned, or sponsored groups. Each submission to the NIH-STAFF E-Mail List must first be reviewed and approved by one of the designated IC Reviewing Officials in accordance with the criteria set forth below to determine whether the message warrants being distributed outside of the IC. The Reviewing Official is responsible for ensuring that IC records are maintained to document review and clearance of messages, including both review by internal officials and officials in appropriate subject matter offices to which the message relates (e.g., Equal Employment Opportunity, Human Resources, Office of Research Services, etc.).

Messages from other HHS OPDIVs must have the approval of their CIO or designated approving official and meet the criteria set forth in NIH-STAFF List Policy.

D2. NIH Review

After review and approval by one of the IC Reviewing Officials or HHS OPDIV designee, the message is reviewed by the NIH-STAFF List Moderators to determine appropriateness for distribution NIH-wide in accordance with the criteria set forth below. Even though the NIH-STAFF Moderators retain final authority to determine the appropriateness of any NIH-STAFF List message, they will work with the ICs in a collegial manner to help them reach their goals. For example, the Moderators may suggest alternative methods for advertising events at NIH.

E. Criteria To Be Used for Screening Messages

E1. The following criteria will be used in determining the appropriateness of a message:

- Is the message of sufficiently broad interest or importance to the NIH community to justify posting it to all employees?

- Are other mailing lists, or other vehicles for disseminating information, such as print media, more appropriate because of the limited focus of the message's interest or target audience? (See Section J., "Alternatives for Disseminating Information.")
- Does the message involve security, public affairs, legal, or other issues that require handling in a different context?
- Are the contents of the message accurate, timely, and complete so that additional correction or clarification messages are not needed?

E2. Elements of a Good Message:

- Contains a descriptive title in the subject line.
- Is short and concise.
- References a website, if available, for detailed information, and includes the full web address. (Attachments are not allowed.)
- Includes point of contact information, i.e., name, telephone number, and e-mail address.
- Includes language on the provision of reasonable accommodations for individuals with disabilities.

E3. Reasonable Accommodation Language:

Providing reasonable accommodations for individuals with disabilities is a requirement for the NIH office that is sponsoring a lecture, conference or event. *

Any announcement advertising a lecture, conference, or event that is open to all employees or members of the public and does not require prior registration, must have the following statement:

> "Sign language interpreters will be provided. Individuals with disabilities who need reasonable accommodation to participate in this (event/training/conference/program) should contact (name and office, telephone number, TTY number and/or the Federal TTY Relay number (1-800-877-8339), and e-mail address)."

For events where registration is required in advance, the following language should be used:

> "Individuals with disabilities who need sign language interpreters and/or reasonable accommodation to participate in this (event/training/conference/program) should contact (name and office, telephone number, TTY number and/or the Federal TTY Relay number (1-800-877-8339), and e-mail address). Requests should be made at least 5 days in advance of the event."

For information on how to provide reasonable accommodations for your event, please contact your IC EEO Officer or the NIH Office of Equal Opportunity.

* For further information on providing reasonable accommodations, see the HHS and/or NIH versions of "Accessing Opportunity: The Plan for the Employment of People With Disabilities in the Federal Government." Also see the NIH Manual 2204, "Reasonable Accommodations," which can be found at http://www1.od.nih.gov/oma/manualchapters/management/2204/ .

E4. Categories Of Appropriate Messages:

- One-time lectures related to the mission of NIH, e.g., a lecture by a visiting scientist or dignitary as part of the NIH Director's Wednesday Afternoon Lectures.
- Official security warnings, instructions, or information, e.g., an announcement concerning heightened security related to a demonstration on the NIH campus.
- Notice of public events of special interest to the broad NIH community, e.g., public television programs about NIH, or that NIH was involved in producing; Research Day; or NIH Library Open House.
- Requests for assistance where the relevant audience is the broad NIH community, e.g., requests for blood donations of a particular type when the Blood Bank is running low, official Federal CFC announcements. CFC is the only authorized solicitation of federal employees for money.
- Information about general employee benefit programs, e.g., information about the Health Fair, or Open Season announcements.
- Information about administrative matters affecting the broad NIH community, e.g., how to communicate with NIH's contract travel agency by e-mail, information about major scheduled NIHnet outages for upgrades, or significant construction disruptions to NIH campus traffic.
- NIH Chartered Organization announcements or activities of interest to the broad NIH community, e.g., information or events for the education or participation of the broad NIH community.

E5. Categories Of Inappropriate Messages:

- Notices of routine and recurring events, meetings, lectures, or organizational activities that focus on specific target audiences or that can be delivered through the NIH Calendar of Events, World Wide Web pages, the CALENDAR mailing list on LISTSERV, or some other more limited mailing list.
- Routine notices about ongoing NIH operational activities and announcements of new websites.
- Commercial announcements or solicitations of any kind.
- Requests for assistance that focus on a specific/specialized audience, e.g., a researcher's request for a certain compound or equipment.
- Personal matters such as leave donation requests, retirement announcements, birth or death announcements, and job location changes.
- The solicitation of funds, or publicizing of fundraising events, for private charities.
- Announcements of a political (e.g., lobbying Congress on behalf of causes, individuals, or organizations; promoting or conducting political activities), religious, or other similarly sensitive nature.
- Non-government matters, e.g., selling a used car, or non-government survey or seminar.
- Repeated announcements about a specific event, e.g., reminders for upcoming events and incremental announcements of a major relocation of personnel.
- Security warnings, instructions, or information by a person other than the responsible security officials.

F. The Process of Message Review and Posting

To accommodate the review and approval process, submissions to the list are held by the NIH-STAFF E-Mail List for review before they are posted. The review process can last from several hours to two business days. When submitting a message, allow for review time. When the message is submitted to the NIH-STAFF E-Mail List via the online form on the NIH-STAFF website, a copy is automatically sent to an IC Reviewing Official for internal clearance. No message will be posted until the NIH-STAFF list moderators receive this clearance. However, internal clearance does not guarantee that the message will be distributed. The NIH-STAFF list moderators retain final authority to determine the appropriateness of any NIH-STAFF message.

Only one message per event or subject is usually permitted. Unless the message is of unusual importance, broadcast messages will be sent after normal business hours, when e-mail traffic is lower. Generally, notices will be distributed the evening after the moderators have approved the message, and will be seen by most NIH employees the next business day. In some cases, the message may be disapproved and not posted at all. If your message is not approved for distribution, you will receive an explanation from the Moderators.

G. Instructions For Submitting An NIH-STAFF E-Mail Message

1. Point your web browser at the NIH-STAFF online submission form. http://list.nih.gov/LISTSERV_WEB/NIH-STAFF/submit-nih-staff.htm
2. Fill out the online form completely. Cutting and pasting of text from other applications is allowed. However, special formatting (bold text, fancy fonts, columns, etc.) will not be preserved. Attachments are NOT permitted.
3. Include a descriptive subject on the Subject: line. ("Seminar" or "Message to NIH Staff" is not sufficient.)
4. In the body of the message, include an e-mail address and telephone number that can be used to request additional information. Include reasonable accommodation language as set forth in Section E3. When the message includes a World Wide Web address (URL), include the entire address so that recipients will see the address as a clickable hyperlink.
5. If you cut and paste text into the message field, avoid using embedded tabs in your text. Tabs tend to change size when pasted into the web page, and may alter the appearance of your text.
6. Indicate whether your message should be sent to DC-area employees only by checking the appropriate button at the bottom of the form.
7. Prior to submitting your message, please ensure that all appropriate IC officials or sponsoring NIH organization(s) reviews the message for appropriateness, accuracy and completeness. This will often expedite review by the NIH-STAFF E-Mail List Moderators.
8. When you have completed filling out the online form, click the submit button to submit your message. The message text will be automatically formatted for you, and a copy will be submitted to the appropriate Reviewing Official. You will receive email notification that your message has been submitted.

9. Submit the message at least 2 business days before you want it to be distributed. Generally, messages will be posted one day after approval by the moderators. However, there is no guarantee that moderators will be able to review and approve a message on a specific date. The moderators cannot "hold" a message for later posting.
10. If you wish to send additional rationale for why the message should be posted, type it in the "Comments" field.
11. The person sending the message can expect to receive numerous "out of office" replies in his or her mailbox. These can be ignored or deleted. The sender may wish to create a rule in his/her email client that will divert all replies to the message to a special folder, or automatically delete them. Note that some people may reply to the sender of the message, even if the e-mail address in the message is different.

H. Time-Critical Messages

E-mail broadcasts, while faster than desk-to-desk paper distribution, are not instantaneous. Further, there is no guarantee about when someone will read his or her e-mail.

NOTE: E-mail broadcasts should not be relied upon as the sole mechanism for emergency announcements. Notices of fire alarms, bomb threats, and other such events will also be handled through more immediate mechanisms as appropriate.

If your posting is time-critical (i.e., it must go out immediately rather than after business hours), you can request urgent handling of your message. Check "YES" at the bottom of the form in response to the question, "Is this an urgent message that cannot wait for overnight distribution?" You will be prompted to justify in writing why your message requires urgent handling. Urgent messages still require internal clearance; it may be helpful to call your IC Reviewing Official (or the OEO Reviewing Official, if you selected OEO in the "IC" field) to expedite clearance of your request.

Once approved, messages may take an hour or longer to be distributed. If you do not see your urgent announcement in your mailbox within an hour and a half after submitting it, please call the CIT Technical Assistance and Support Center (TASC) at 301-594-6248
(TTY 301-496-8294) and request assistance.

I. Rules For Corrections, Updates Or Changes

Normally, only one message will be allowed per subject. Therefore, messages should be carefully reviewed for accuracy prior to sending. To avoid burdening the NIH community with unnecessary e-mail due to corrections and updates, it is important that the sender of the message ensure the accuracy and completeness of the message with all appropriate parties prior to original dissemination.

J. Alternatives for Disseminating Information

While the NIH-STAFF E-mail List is a useful tool for disseminating information to the NIH community, other options exist and in many cases may be more appropriate at targeting the desired audience. Some examples include: The NIH Record; the NIH Calendar of Events (Yellow Sheet); the NIH Recreation and Welfare Newsletter; the NIH Home Page; the NIH

Calendar of Biomedical Meetings and Events; the NIH Catalyst; the Deputy Director for Intramural Research's (DDIR) Bulletin Board; web-based special interest groups; and e-mail lists targeted to specific groups. Information on additional options is provided via the links below:

Information on how to promote an event at NIH--e.g., newsletters, bulletin boards, posters, calendars:
http://www.nih.gov/employee/advert.htm .

Information on various electronic approaches that can be used to advertise an event:
http://www.nih.gov/news/Information/meetips.htm .

Information on the criteria used to determine if a special promotion for an event can be run on the NIH home page:
http://www.nih.gov/news/postevnt.htm

K. For Further Information

For further information, please call the CIT Technical Assistance and Support Center (TASC) at 301-594-6248 (TTY 301-496-8294), or send e-mail to the NIH-STAFF Moderator (link).

L. Records Retention and Disposal:

All records (**e-mail** and non-e-mail) pertaining to this chapter must be retained and disposed of under the authority of NIH Manual 1743, "Keeping and Destroying Records, Appendix 1, *NIH Records Control Schedule.*" Official records should be maintained in accordance with the retention schedule applicable to the given subject matter of the message. Note: All e-mail suitable for NIH-wide dissemination are considered official records. The originator of the message is responsible for maintaining the official record.

> **NIH e-mail messages**. NIH e-mail messages (messages, including attachments, that are created on NIH computer systems or transmitted over NIH networks) that are evidence of the activities of the agency or have informational value are considered Federal records. ***These records must be maintained in accordance with current NIH Records Management guidelines. Contact your IC Records Officer for additional information.***
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> All e-mail messages are considered Government property, and, if requested for a legitimate Government purpose, must be provided to the requester. Employees' supervisors, NIH staff conducting official reviews or investigations, and the Office of Inspector General may request access to or copies of the e-mail messages. E-mail messages must also be provided to Congressional oversight committees if requested and are subject to Freedom of Information Act requests. Since most e-mail systems have back-up files that are sometimes retained for significant periods of time, e-mail messages and attachments may be retrievable from a back-up file after they have been deleted from an

individual's computer. The back-up files are subject to the same requests as the original messages.

M. Management Controls:

Adequate and reasonable management controls have been included in the approval process required of both IC approving officials and NIH staff moderators. If CIT determines that ICs are not following this policy, they will ensure that the appropriate IC officials are notified and the issue is resolved.