

EMAIL ALERTS & LISTSERVES

Email alerts are a “quick and dirty” way to communicate with your group’s membership. Listserves are simple and free to set up, and can be much easier to manage than an email list, particularly when your group gets large. Use email alerts and listserves to announce meetings and rallies, send out action alerts, or even to seek information from other group members.

Most listserves give you the option of receiving messages in two different formats: regular or digest. With a digest format you receive all messages posted to the listserv in the form of one condensed document per day, whereas with the regular format you receive messages as they are sent from each individual member.

EMAIL ALERTS

(Adapted from TechRocks, “Writing Effective Email Alerts”, www.techrocks.org)

An email action alert is simply a call to action – an attempt to get people to do something such as call their city-council member or come to a rally or event. Email Action Alerts serve as a quick and easy way to invite people to get involved in their community or political process. You can reach hundreds of people with the click of a mouse and facilitate quick and easy exchanges of information. For example, including an action item in a listserv or on your web-site is a great way to remind your constituents that they can effect change.

WRITING GOOD ACTION ALERTS:

1. **Use a catchy subject line.** You only get one chance to make a good first impression. If you have a catchy subject line people are more inclined to read what you have to say.
2. **Keep it simple yet informative.** Speak in a conversational tone and keep it short, getting to the point right away. Ask for one clear action. If you try to include too much, the impact of your message will get lost.
3. **Don’t hide your alert in a newsletter.** The e-newsletter format is not necessarily the most effective format for generating political action—your alert can be overshadowed by the other information in the newsletter. When it is critical that your constituents respond to your action item, send a separate email action alert with just one clear call to action.
4. **Back up your issue.** Make sure to give just enough background information and facts to give the issue some validity without bogging down the document with data. Include links to other websites with more information.
5. **Empower your audience.** Let recipients know that their action will actually make a difference and thank them when they take action. For example, send a thank you email to all those who took part in an action to email a letter to their city councilperson; let each person know the councilperson’s response to the multitude of emails he received on the issue.
6. **Personalize the issue.** Connect your alert to the recipients’ lives and let them know how your issue affects their families and their communities.
7. **Make it Urgent.** Stress the urgency of the alert. Make it clear why you are sending the alert today instead of three weeks from now or next year.
8. **Date it.** Always include a date on your messages – emails can get forwarded around a lot and for long periods of time so it is important to show that your alert is current.
9. **Always sign your messages.** It will give you credibility when people know who you are, what group you are from, and how to contact you.

10. **Remember the domino theory.** Encourage recipients of the alert to forward the email. Think of the number of people you could reach if each person on your email list forwarded your action alert to at least one other person and so on and so on.
11. **Privacy is key.** When sending emails from an email account vs. a listserv, use the “Bcc” field, which stands for blind carbon copy. This field hides the individual email addresses so they are not displayed to everyone who gets the email. In addition, recipients of the email cannot reply back to the entire list.

LISTSERVES

There are several different types of listserves:

1. **Moderated:** You (or a moderator you designate) approve each message before it is posted to the list. This option allows you to weed out messages that are not appropriate.
2. **Un-moderated/Open discussion:** Subscribers can post freely.
3. **E-newsletter:** Only the list owner can post to a newsletter/announcement list; messages from subscribers do not appear on the list. (*see attached example from Urban Outdoors*)

SETTING UP A LISTSERVE:

Option 1: Use an on-line listserv service. These services are usually free and offer you many different options in the design and maintenance of your listserv. Bear in mind, though, that the company will usually have ads on the emails sent out.

General sites that offer groups free listserves:

- www.topica.com
- www.yahogroups.com
- www.listbot.com

Option 2: Join a pre-existing listserv. There are plenty of pre-existing park-related listserves that allow you to post relevant information. Joining a pre-existing listserv may be more suitable for small park groups because there is already an existing audience.

Parks related listserves:

- www.treebranch.com: Neighborhood Open Space Coalition maintains a series of park, garden and waterfront listserves that you can join such as:
 - ◆ QueensParks@treebranch.com
 - ◆ cyberparks@treebranch.com
 - ◆ cybergardens@treebranch.com
- www.waterwire.net: Metropolitan Waterfront Alliance maintains a waterfront specific listserv.
- www.pps.org/services/listserv.htm: Project for Public Spaces offers a variety of listserves covering such topics as public spaces, urban parks, and public markets.

Option 3: Purchase specific listserv software that can be installed and managed from your computer. This option is a bit more expensive but allows you the most control. However, you should be comfortable managing the tech problems that may arise to use this option.

ETIQUETTE TIPS WHEN WRITING TO A LISTSERVE:

1. Keep your messages relevant to the topic and membership of the listserv.
2. If you have a comment or message directed at one specific person, do not send it to the listserv, but to him or her directly.
3. Remember that emails are not confidential or private, and can be forwarded on to hundreds of people.
4. Be polite and respectful of the other views that get posted on the listserv.
5. Always sign your message.