

Section 4: Electronic Communication

Electronic communication (email and distribution lists or “listservs”) can be a helpful tool in exchanging information and ideas quickly. It also presents several potential obstacles to clear communication, due to the speed and ease of transmission and the absence of body language and vocal cues. Please consider these guidelines in addition to any policies of your employing agency to help ensure that electronic communication supports VACCRRRA’s goals of professionalism and peer support.

Composing Email:

1. Write concise, well-structured emails and use short, descriptive subjects.
2. While emails tend to have a slightly less formal tone than other professional correspondence, avoid internet abbreviations, emoticons, and elaborate stationery.
3. Proper spelling, grammar and punctuation are important. Also reread before sending, checking for tone and content – is the message professional? Are references to third parties made in a respectful manner? Does the message provide enough information for those not present during past discussions?
4. Be judicious with attachments, and when you must attach a file use the most accessible format you have available (PDF is generally a safe choice).
5. Before forwarding a message, consider the intention of the original sender. When in doubt, ask permission before sharing.
6. Accidents happen, so only send emails of which the content could be displayed on a public notice board. If they cannot be displayed publicly in their current state, consider rephrasing the email, or using the telephone.
7. Do not forward chain letters.

Listservs

VACCRRRA sponsored listservs exist to provide a medium for ongoing discussion between service group members outside of regularly scheduled meetings. Listservs are an ideal way to solicit input regarding best practice, brainstorm about solutions to problems, and share resources and information. Listservs require even more care and discretion than individual email, because they often include members who are not known to one another. Here are some key considerations in addition to the guidelines above:

1. In order to ensure that critical information is shared by all, listservs are open to all VACCRRRA agency staff at directors’ discretion.
2. Listserv content should be pertinent to all. If the issue only impacts a subset of the listserv members, email them directly. This also applies when replying to a listserv posting – if a reply is not relevant to the whole group, copy the thread into a new email and only send it to the intended recipient(s).
3. Dispensing with some pleasantries of spoken conversation is not only acceptable, it’s preferred. Don’t send a “thank you” or “have a nice day” message to the listserv.
4. When issues arise on listserv that require interpretations of grant specifications or raise concerns with broader systemic issues, service group members should first turn to their supervisor or director for clarification and support.