Tips for Constructing Effective Emails in the Nonprofit Sector

1. Use an accessible format

Use a template for email messages so the format is consistent and easy to read. If there is significant content in the message, use headings or bullet points.

2. Accentuate important information

Communicate the main purpose of the email in the first two lines, and accentuate the important information (e.g., date, time, location) by bolding, underlining, or italicizing.

3. Include an effective subject line

Always use a subject line. Make sure the subject line describes what the email will be about and is properly spelled. Avoid spam-prone words, such as "free" or "Hi", and symbols such as $ or *.

4. Identify any links or attachments present in the email

Avoid ambiguous links (e.g., "Click Here") or attachments (e.g., "Document"). Put the main message in the email, and use links and attachments for less essential information that will not fit in a short email message.

5. Do not overuse visual effects

Use visual effects only if they enhance the email. Ensure that they are neat and can quickly and easily be downloaded.

6. Ensure mobile readability

Become aware of your target audience: are they likely to receive emails on a smart mobile device (e.g., Blackberry® smartphone or IPhone®)? If so, make sure the email is readable on smart mobile devices.

7. Time it right

Send the email early in the morning, and do not expect that your recipient will check and reply to your email over the weekend.

8. Become known to your audience

Familiarity with the sender is important for the recipient. Use the appropriate "From" address: use your name if you believe the reader will identify with you, and use your organization's name if you believe the reader will identify with the organization.

9. Segment your email list according to preferences chosen by recipients.

To ensure the recipient will consider the email content relevant or interesting, allow the people on your email database to select the types of emails they would like to receive from your organization (e.g., upcoming events, newsletter, region-specific information).

10. Personalize

Personally address your recipient (e.g., "Dear John" or "Hi Jillian").