Policy on DAR-related e-communications

Policy Type: Local
Responsible Office: Office of Development and Alumni Relations
Initial Policy Approved: 5/2009
Current Revision Approved: 8/2015

Policy Statement and Purpose

All official business e-communications with donors, alumni and prospects must be coordinated with the Office of Development and Alumni Relations’ Communications office. Emails to boards and committees are not governed by this policy.

A constituent should not receive more than one e-communication per day. It is important to schedule emails in advance, keeping in mind posted turnaround times. Email sent to the entire alumni and/or donor base have priority. All e-communications to donors, alumni and prospects must include an opt-out mechanism.

The DAR Communications and Online Services groups develop and send electronic communications to alumni and donors. These items include e-newsletters, email campaigns, solicitations, event notifications, etc. Use of other email systems is not permitted.

Units are permitted to communicate electronically only with donors, alumni and constituents who are affiliated with that unit. If a unit wishes to communicate electronically with donors, alumni or constituents who do not have an affiliation with that unit, the unit must acquire written permission from the senior director of DAR communications in consultation, as applicable, with the unit and the RADAR Central Services Committee. The senior director of DAR communications, in consultation, as applicable, with the AVP of Alumni Relations and the RADAR Central Services Committee, must approve any electronic communication sent to the entire alumni base.

Turnaround times established by DAR and defined on the DAR intranet must be followed for development and deployment of e-communications. Any major changes or additions to the e-communication or the recipient criteria could result in the rescheduling of the e-communication.

All members of the Development and Alumni Relations team must adhere to the Commonwealth of Virginia’s Use of Internet and Electronic Communications Systems (Policy 1.75). The Online Services team will monitor e-communications and other content posted on internal and external websites. Any conduct violations will be addressed under Commonwealth of Virginia’s Standards of Conduct Policy (Policy 1.60).

The purpose of this policy is to maintain the value and quality of e-communications from VCU and its individual academic and administrative units. When multiple e-communications are received on the same day, they often lose value in the eyes of the constituent leading to decreased open and click-through rates.

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Who Should Know this Policy?

All university employees engaged in activities related to development and alumni relations are responsible for knowing this policy and familiarizing themselves with its contents and provisions.

Definitions

Official business e-communications
E-communications that pertain to any fundraising, donor, prospect, alumni or university-affiliated foundation activities, including, but not limited to, solicitations, event notices, surveys, e-newsletters and updates from units.

Advancement Services' systems
All systems managed by Advancement Services, including, but not limited to, RADAR, Development and Alumni Relations intranet and Internet sites, online reporting center, online giving and payments, online event registrations and event registrations, e-communications, alumni website and alumni portal.

E-newsletters
E-newsletters are in-depth e-communications that include multiple news items, links and pictures, and possibly forms.

E-blasts
E-blasts are one-time communications, such as event notices, save the dates, news announcements, etc.

E-solicitations
E-solicitations are communications, either one-time or recurring, that ask constituents to make a gift. E-solicitations will always require either a link to give.

Recipient list
The recipient list is the list of emails to which an e-communication is sent.

Related Documents

- Advancement Services' Request for Services Policy
- Correspondence and Solicitation Code policy
- Disciplinary Policy
- VCU Identity guidelines [http://www.identity.vcu.edu/]
- CAN-SPAM Act: Requirements for Commercial Emailers
- Direct Marketing Association’s Online Marketing Guidelines
- Project turnaround times [See DAR staff Intranet]
- Quality-assurance checks for e-communications [See DAR staff Intranet]
- E-Communications Best Practices [See DAR staff Intranet]

Contacts
The Office of Development and Alumni Relations officially interprets this policy. The Office of Development and Alumni Relations is responsible for obtaining approval for any revision as required by the policy. Creating and Maintaining Policies and Procedures through the appropriate governance structures. Please direct policy questions to the senior director of Development and Alumni Communications.

Procedures

Request and delivery
1. The email requestor must receive approval from the unit dean or director to email the desired recipient group.
2. Submit an Advancement Services Help Desk request.
   a. To expedite creation of your request, please make sure this form is complete and all content is attached to the request.
   b. Review the DAR calendar (http://staff.oda.vcu.edu/calendar) before choosing a send date. Remember, each constituent should receive, at most, one email per day.
   c. Email project turnaround times [See DAR staff intranet] must be adhered to when scheduling emails. Turnaround times begin when all information and content is received by DAR Communications. If all information and content is not received in sufficient time to meet the turnaround guidelines, the email is rescheduled.
   d. When a ticket is submitted, the email is automatically entered on the DAR staff calendar for planning purposes. Requestors do not need to create a separate calendar entry.
3. The DAR Communications Office reviews requests and approves or adjusts, as necessary, the requested send date.
4. The DAR Office reviews email content, enters appropriate data into RADAR and facilitates the approval process before the email is deployed.
5. The DAR Communications team and the Online Services team build and test emails, as well as pulls queries to develop the list of constituents specified in the request to be emailed.
6. A final round of internal testing is conducted using a variety of email clients (AOL, Gmail, Hotmail, Lotus) once final approval is received. Emails must be approved by noon the day before the scheduled send date. If approval is not received from the requestor, the email is rescheduled.
7. All emails are scheduled for delivery at 10 a.m. on the requested send date. Different send times are available on request.
8. The correspondence, open rate, click rate, unsubscribes and bounced emails are available on each constituent record in RADAR.
   a. Invalid emails are marked as such.
9. When managing the calendar, the Communications team follows this hierarchy:
   a. Communications sent to the entire alumni and/or donor base have priority. No additional emails can be sent on a day that the entire alumni and/or donor base will receive an email.
   b. Priority 1: E-newsletters. These will rarely, if ever, be moved from the scheduled send date. These should be scheduled well in advance.
   c. Priority 2: E-blasts. These might be added to calendar closer to mail date, but units are encouraged to schedule these well in advance and submit the content closer to the send date.
   d. Priority 3: E-solicitations. These should be scheduled well in advance and have flexibility in mail date if an urgent e-blast needs to mail on the same day.
   e.

Email recipient list
- The requestor must provide the criteria for selecting email recipients from RADAR.
- Development and Alumni Relations emails only constituents with RADAR records. Exceptions are approved by the AVP of Advancement Services.
Opt-out standard
- All e-communications must include an option to unsubscribe from future e-communications.
- DAR emails must adhere to the opt-out standard developed by the Direct Marketing Association and its subsidiary, the Association of Interactive Marketing. This standard applies to all of the DMA/IMA members, many of whom are the nation’s largest nonprofits who use direct marketing to raise funds. Their online standards were adopted in January 2002.
- If a constituent unsubscribes from a specific unit email, the constituent still receives email from other units and/or VCU Alumni. A constituent also can unsubscribe from all emails for VCU DAR.

University standards
- All e-communications must include a link to the university or VCU Alumni privacy statement.
- Departments must provide official university logos and banners using proper VCU identity. Units must provide these graphics in a jpg or gif format. The DAR Communications office consults with University Relations if an identity question arises.
- All DAR emails follow university and Associated Press style guidelines.

Forms
See the Advancement Services Online Request forms at http://staff.oda.vcu.edu/HelpDesk.

Revision History
This policy supersedes the policy of the same name approved by the vice president for Development and Alumni Relations in December 2013.

This policy supersedes the policy of the same name approved by the vice president for Development and Alumni Relations in December 2012.

This policy supersedes the following BOV policy approved in May 2009:
- 9.1.4 Advancement-related E-mail Policy

FAQs
This policy has no FAQs.