Policy UCM006: Mass Email and Distribution Policy

Recommended for Approval by:

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Approved by:

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A. Intent

This policy establishes guidelines for the appropriate use, approval, and formatting of mass email communications at PennWest. It ensures that messages sent to large university audiences are relevant, accessible, consistent with institutional branding, and compliant with applicable laws and procedures.

B. Definitions

Approved sender account: An account for a unit or department that has been approved by University Communications and Marketing and has access to the appropriate distribution lists.

Distribution list: An email list that delivers messages to multiple recipients simultaneously (e.g. all students, faculty, staff, or departments).

Mass email: Any message sent to the entire university or a large group (e.g. all students, faculty, or staff). All mass emails must comply with PennWest guidelines, procedures, and relevant laws. These requirements do not apply to internal communications within units, schools, colleges, or emails sent to subscribers who voluntarily opted in.

C. Policy

1. General Mass Email Appropriate Use

- Messages that directly relate to the continuance of university business
- Messages that alert the campus community of health and safety issues
- Messages that relate to changes in university policy or time-sensitive procedures

- Messages that inform the campus community about events and opportunities available to them and offered or sponsored by departments, divisions, groups, or individuals currently affiliated with PennWest, including special programs, speakers, research opportunities, and events.

2. **Approved Sender Account**

Only a division or department email account with access to the appropriate distribution list is approved to send mass emails.

3. **Content Responsibility and Approvals**
   - Content must be relevant to the sender and credible to at least half of the intended recipients.
   - Mass emails must be informational. Senders are responsible for the content and formatting of mass emails within their unit, including fact-checking and proofreading before sending.

4. **Platforms and Delivery**
   - University-approved platforms include Outlook, Mailchimp, and Constant Contact.
   - Other approved tools must still adhere to the university's review and approval processes.

5. **Branding and Compliance**
   i. **Required Content**
      - Approved PennWest logo at the top of message.
      - "PennWest University" identified in plain text messages and the text-only portion of an HTML message.
      - A clear address to the intended audience at the beginning of the email (e.g., "Dear faculty and staff," "Dear students," "I am writing to you today...").
      - If not possible, include a note in the footer identifying the intended audience (e.g., "This message was sent to all faculty, staff, and students").
      - The name of the sending unit and the signatories of the message.

   ii. **ADA Compliance**
      All mass emails must be ADA-accessible and compliant as follows:
      - **Use a Clear Structure:** Organize your email with headings and subheadings to help screen readers navigate content.
      - **Alternative Text for Images:** Provide alt text for all images to ensure accessibility for screen reader users.

- **Descriptive Link Text:** Avoid "click here" and use text that describes the link's destination.

- **High Contrast:** Ensure text contrasts well with the background for readability.

- **Simple Language:** Use clear language to assist individuals with cognitive disabilities.

- **Test on Multiple Devices:** Ensure the email is accessible across mobile, tablet, and desktop devices.

iii. Images

Images must be high resolution and appropriately sized to fit the email template. Pixelated, poorly cropped images should not be used.

- Images must have any text saved as part of the image in compliance with accessibility standards set by the Americans with Disabilities Act.
- All images must have alternative text that describes the image being used in a way that relates to the reason behind it. Example: photo of a man wearing a red hat outside cheering for a sporting event.

iv. Videos

Videos can be included in emails as links — either text links or links from an image. Videos should open in a new window to play. Videos can be hosted on YouTube. Embedded videos are not complaint with accessibility standards and lack playback controls.

v. Links

Use text to describe the destination of the link.
- Hyperlinks should be embedded in relevant text, not visible as URLs.
- Avoid phrases like "click here" or "learn more"; use descriptive link text instead.
  - Example: replace "click here to go to https://pennwest.edu" with "visit the PennWest homepage for news and events."
- Be cautious when including links to external websites. The external link should be relevant to the message and clearly stated.

6. Emergency Communications

The [university emergency procedures and notification system](#) will be followed in the event of an emergency.

D. Procedure(s)
1. Approved Sender Account

Only a division or department email account with access to the appropriate distribution list is approved to send mass emails. To request a division or department email account, email communications@pennwest.edu.

All sender accounts require approval from the appropriate vice president. When requesting an account, please provide University Communications and Marketing with a list of individuals who will have permission to send messages, as well as the groups (e.g., faculty, staff, students) and campus audiences (all PennWest or campus-specific) they should be authorized to email.

2. **Content Responsibility and Approvals**
   - **Campuswide or University-wide Emails** (e.g. all students, all faculty, and all staff at once) must be reviewed and approved by the University Communications and Marketing.
   - **College or School Emails (Internal).** The dean must approve sent to all faculty, students, and staff within a college or school.
   - **Departmental Emails (Internal).** The respective vice president must approve emails sent to all faculty, students, and staff within a department.
   - **Presidential Communications.** Emails sent on behalf of the Office of the President or appearing as "from" the President are drafted, edited, and distributed by University Communications and Marketing in collaboration with the president's staff.

E. **Related Policies**
   Supersedes Policy AD010: Email Distribution Policy
   Policy UMC001: Licensing, Trademarks, and Logos

F. **Contact Information**
   University Communications and Marketing
   communications@pennwest.edu

G. **Policy Review Schedule**
   All policies will be reviewed every two years or on an as needed basis if a change in Board of Governors, Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education, or Pennsylvania law would create the need for an immediate change.