

SETA E-Mail Guidelines

Presented to Area 67 for approval October 4, 2020

1. Background

SETA's adoption of G Suite, as recommended by the Cloud Ad Hoc Committee in April 2020 and approved by the IT Committee in May 2020, necessitates the revamp of the E-mail Guidelines. Changes in the architecture of SETA's e-mail system require some of the revisions; advances in technology since the Guidelines were written in 2011 inform some of the other changes.

Additionally, the IT Committee urges that we remove technical details from this policy document so that the IT Committee can make decisions affecting the architecture and technical implementation without requiring a full assembly vote.

2. Proposal

The IT Committee moves that Area 67 adopt Section 3¹ in its entirety as recommended guidelines pertaining to E-Mail.

¹ **Note: The appendices that appear at the end of this document are not part of the formal motion but are intended to be supplemental information only and may be updated from time to time.**

3. E-Mail Guidelines

This section describes the use, management, and support of the SETA e-mail system and provides guidance with respect to addressing, content, anonymity, and general e-mail usage.

While the SETA IT Chair is ultimately responsible for the SETA E-mail system, this responsibility is delegated to positions within the IT Committee. The IT Committee will maintain a document, available on its webpage, that specifies the current architecture of the system and the positions responsible for its parts. The trusted servants filling the positions will be identified on the Committee's webpage.

a. Distribution Lists & Addressing

i. Anonymity

“Electronic mail is a widely used and accepted method of communication. It is now used regularly as a service tool in A.A., but as with any service, we need to ensure the Fellowship's Traditions are maintained while still receiving the most benefit from this form of communication.

When using e-mail it is necessary to consider the anonymity of the recipients of messages. Sending messages to multiple recipients that disclose the e-mail addresses of everyone on the addressee list is a potential break of someone else's anonymity. Therefore it is a good idea to obtain the recipient's explicit permission before using his or her personal e-mail address for A.A. correspondence.”

[MG-18]

When possible, use SETA-provided e-mail addresses to ensure the privacy of members' personal e-mail address. When corresponding with individuals who do not have a SETA-provided e-mail address, please pause to consider the possibility of your message being distributed outside of an A.A. context. Consider the suggestions below regarding usage of the TO:, CC:, & BCC: address blocks. When in doubt, use the BCC: section.

ii. Broadcast Announcements and Virtual Discussions

In general, there are two ways in which e-mail is used in our organization: broadcast announcements and virtual discussions.

(1) Broadcast Announcements are e-mails that are usually informational, are sent to a group of people, and usually don't require any response. Examples of these are the distribution of a meeting

announcement, flyer, newsletter, and minutes. In general, a broadcast is one-way.

(2) Virtual Discussions consist of an e-mail “conversation” in which a message is sent, often soliciting a response. A common example is when several people are attempting to schedule a meeting time and place.

iii. Should I use TO:, CC:, or BCC:?

(a) messages being sent for informational purposes only (i.e., announcements, flyers, minutes, etc) should be sent either via BCC or by email lists/groups that hide the recipients and only display the list name in the To: or CC: fields, i.e. like [SETA-Announce] or [cpc-forum], etc.

(b) messages being sent which are intended to be part of a “discussion” between a group of individuals should be sent via TO and CC so that members can “reply all” and conduct a virtual discussion, or email lists/groups can be used for this purpose; and

(c) always be aware that an individual’s anonymity can potentially be violated by the “reversal” of their e-mail address. if you are in doubt, please use the BCC or an email list/group that hides recipient addresses as described above.

iii. Reply & Reply All

Users sometimes get confused by when to use the “Reply” vs. the “Reply All” option when responding to an e-mail message. Use “Reply” when you want to reply only to the sender of a message. Use “Reply All” when you want all of the recipients of the original message to also see your reply.

Please pause before responding to an e-mail message and think about which is more appropriate. It is inconsiderate to “Reply All” unnecessarily as this needlessly clutters people’s inboxes. If you are in doubt about which to use, we suggest using the “Reply” option and letting the original sender decide whether your message warrants being forwarded to the other recipients.

On the other hand, a common and effective use for the “Reply All” option is in the case of conducting a “virtual” discussion in which all recipients are participating. In this case, it is often more effective to just send your reply out to all recipients rather than waiting for the original sender to forward your response to the rest.

b. Content

Only business pertaining to A.A. should be conducted using the SETA e-mail system. The SETA e-mail system is not intended for the dissemination of jokes, advertising, inspirational, chain-mail, or any other non-A.A. related communication.

Prior to sending a message, a simple rule of thumb is to ask yourself if your message pertains to A.A.'s primary purpose, SETA's mission of facilitating A.A. service within Area 67 or to our charge of sending a delegate to the General Service Conference.

i. Communication to people outside of A.A. – especially members of the professional community:

“It is strongly suggested that A.A. members not send bulk unsolicited e-mail messages for A.A. service. By doing so, they could be bringing the A.A. name into public controversy and damaging the reputation of A.A. as a whole. It may also be illegal.” [MG-18]

GSO suggests sending personalized e-mails one at a time rather than bulk mailings.

ii. Accidentally becoming spam

Be aware that recipients use various means of spam filtering. So, even though your message is legitimate and not part of a bulk mailing, consider having an alternative follow-up plan in case there is no initial response—it may not be due to the recipient's indifference.

iii. SETA Documents

Emails that contain documents such as the SETA roster, meeting minutes, convention reports, etc., that include full names, addresses, phone numbers, and/or other confidential information should include the following disclaimer in the body of the e-mail:

“Confidential – Full Names Used

This report is a confidential A.A. document, for members only since it contains members' full names and addresses. Please treat this information with care to protect the anonymity of the persons listed.”

iv. Financials, minutes, newsletters, flyers, etc.

“Electronic transfer of Area information including financials, Area minutes, newsletters, flyers, committee job descriptions, etc. should follow current established Area practice of not using last names or personal contact information.”

c. E-mail Footers & Signatures

Another question that often comes up is that of how to sign off on an e-mail. Except at the public level, A.A. Tradition allows individuals to decide for themselves how to handle their personal anonymity. SETA IT recommends that you sign your e-mails in whatever manner you are comfortable with. Some individuals choose to sign with their full names whereas others may choose first name / last initial and still others may opt to exclude their name altogether, using only their service position or simply “a member of A.A.”

SETA recommends that, at the public level– i.e., in an e-mail message that may end up accessible by the general public, you should avoid using your last name. On the other hand, GSO guidance acknowledges that when communicating with professionals, use of a full name lends credibility to the e-mail and gives it a professional feel. GSO recommends placing the text “(name not for publication)” alongside such signatures.

i. Disclaimer

(1) All outgoing e-mail will have the following text appended at the bottom of the message, below the user’s signature:

Usual Disclaimer: *“This message contains confidential information intended only for the named recipients. If you are not named, you should not disseminate, distribute or copy this e-mail. Please notify the sender immediately if you have received this e-mail by mistake and delete this e-mail from your system. Please note that any opinions in this e-mail are those of the author and may not represent those of SETA or A.A. as a whole. E-mail transmission cannot be guaranteed to be secure or error-free as information could be intercepted, corrupted, destroyed, delayed, incomplete or infected with malware. The sender therefore does not accept liability for any errors or omissions in the contents of this message, or which arise as a result of e-mail transmission.”*

(2) The SETA E-Mail System will be configured so that the disclaimer is automatically appended to the end of each message, if possible.

ii. Signature Recommendations

Having a signature appended to the end of outgoing e-mail messages lends a professional touch as well as makes it easier for the recipients to get in touch with the sender.

Our E-Mail system can be configured to automatically append a signature to every message so that the user does not have to repeatedly type all of their contact information. Since SETA e-mail account holders are able to edit their own signatures, each user is free to disclose as much or as little as they feel comfortable with.

At a minimum, a user's position, the name of SETA, the mailing address, and the user's SETA e-mail address should be listed.

Where users disclose their full name, the GSO Guidelines suggest adding the phrase "(name not for publication)" to the end of the user's name to help make it clear that A.A. members' names should not be disclosed at the public level.

Signature & Disclaimer Sample #1:

John Smith (name not for publication)
Chair, Information Technology Committee
Southeast Texas Area Assembly
P.O. Box 130433
Houston, TX 77219
phone: (555) 555-5555
e-mail (1): it@aa-seta.org
e-mail (2): john.s@aa-seta.org

Usual Disclaimer: *"This message contains confidential information intended only for the named recipients. If you are not named, you should not disseminate, distribute or copy this e-mail. Please notify the sender immediately if you have received this e-mail by mistake and delete this e-mail from your system. Please note that any opinions in this e-mail are those of the author and may not represent those of SETA or A.A. as a whole. E-mail transmission cannot be guaranteed to be secure or error-free as information could be intercepted, corrupted, destroyed, delayed, incomplete or infected with malware. The sender therefore does not accept liability for any errors or omissions in the contents of this message, or which arise as a result of e-mail transmission."*

Signature & Disclaimer Sample #2:

Chairperson, Information Technology Committee
Southeast Texas Area Assembly
P.O. Box 130433 Houston, TX 77219
e-mail: it@aa-seta.org

Usual Disclaimer: *"This message contains confidential information intended only for the named recipients. If you are not named, you should not disseminate, distribute or copy this e-mail. Please notify the sender immediately if you have received this e-mail by mistake and delete this e-mail from your system. Please note that any opinions in this e-mail are those of the author and may not represent those of SETA or A.A. as a whole. E-mail transmission cannot be guaranteed to be secure or error-free as information could be intercepted, corrupted, destroyed, delayed, incomplete or infected with malware. The sender therefore does not accept liability for any errors or omissions in the contents of this message, or which arise as a result of e-mail transmission."*

iii. Distribution Groups

Distribution groups that are intended to be "opt-in" groups, such as the SETA-ANNOUNCE@aa-seta.org group, should be configured so that subscribers can "unsubscribe" from the list. The system should be configured to append unsubscribe instructions to the end of group e-mails similar to the following example:

To unsubscribe from this group, send email to seta-announce+unsubscribe@aa-seta.org

d. e-mail Client

The term "e-mail client" refers to an end user's software for accessing e-mail. Software such as Microsoft Outlook and Outlook Express is commonly installed on many computers and can be used to access an e-mail account. Additionally, many e-mail systems may be accessed through your web browser, such as Gmail or Yahoo Mail. It is recommended though, that you use a provider's native client (e.g., Gmail for G Suite) when possible to enjoy the maximum feature set available from that provider.

Furthermore, many smartphones and other mobile devices provide yet another e-mail application. Provider's apps will usually provide a better user experience than a different client (i.e., the Gmail app works best with Gmail, etc.) and so it is recommended over other client apps.

e. Collaborative Inbox Groups

The SETA IT Committee recommends exclusive use of Collaborative Inbox Groups for all SETA position-based electronic correspondence for the following reasons:

- (1) correspondence can be saved for archival & historical purposes
- (2) when a position rotates, the new person has access to older communications that may be helpful; whereas, otherwise, correspondence tends to get lost upon rotation
- (3) from a technical support perspective, it is easier on the IT folks to troubleshoot one system, rather than having to deal with a wide array of different e-mail clients
- (4) it is easier for many folks to remember a position rather than an individual's private e-mail address
- (5) management and maintenance are easier upon rotation in that there are fewer changes with respect to updating address lists, rosters, databases, etc.
- (6) it enables us to have "closed" distribution groups which both cut down on spam and help ensure anonymity
- (7) multiple people, such as alternates, or in the case of committees, secretaries, can assist in replying to requests received in the Collaborative Inboxes.

Messages received from Collaborative Inbox Groups can be replied to via email. When you hold a position, it is recommended you use the "Send-As" capability to send email as that position (e.g., chair@aa-seta.org) instead of your own name (e.g., john.d@aa-seta.org), in your replies, it is also recommended that you CC: the position's email address (e.g., chair@aa-seta.org) so that the Collaborative Inbox Group has a record of both received and sent messages. If the reply is trivial in nature, and/or you are not sharing the Collaborative Inbox with anyone (like your alternate), then using CC: isn't needed. But for all replies that should be kept for future use, remember to use CC:

f. Access

You will have access to both anonymity-protected information and private information in your e-mail. SETA IT asks you to logout when through with your e-mail and/or activate some level of access security on any device where you use SETA's e-mail system so that a non-member cannot, even inadvertently, access the private information. Access security may be a PIN, password protection, facial or fingerprint recognition, code sent to a different device, etc. Of course, logging out is not secure if there is easy access to your password, especially with a form-filler.

It is not necessary to own a personal computer or laptop or tablet to utilize e-mail. The SETA e-mail and group mailing system can be accessed via your smartphone or any

computer connected to the Internet. Therefore SETA e-mail and group mailing services may be accessible via the public library, Internet cafes, coffee shops, and anywhere else that a publicly accessible Internet terminal is available. Just remember to logout before walking away.

g. Storage

Whenever possible, Collaborative Inbox Groups should be used and e-mails should be stored in SETA Collaborative Inbox Groups for position-based mail. Avoid storing e-mails in your personal e-mail system. That way when you rotate out of your position, it will be easier to hand your correspondence off to the next person.

In order to use position-based email addresses in the Collaborative Inbox Groups, you must first have a SETA login. You can request a SETA login account via the SETA website at <https://aa-seta.org>.

h. Wise e-mail usage

The following are good “rules of thumb” to keep in mind when dealing with any e-mail system and are provided here as suggestions to help protect yourself as well as SETA’s individual & group email systems:

- (1) Be wary of unsolicited attachments, even from people you know
- (2) Save and scan any attachments before opening them
- (3) Don’t give e-mail addresses out unthinkingly
- (4) Be aware of options selected by default
- (5) Report spam
- (6) Don’t follow links in spam messages
- (7) Be on the lookout for Phishing attacks
- (8) Trust your instincts

Appendix A: Resources and References

The following documents were reviewed and considered during the drafting of the above guidelines. The content of these documents is available on the IT Committee page of the SETA Website at <http://www.aa-seta.org/itpolicy/>.

- (A) July 2011 – SETA E-Mail Guidelines
- (B) October 2018 – SETA IT Chair Job Description
- (C) November 2018 – GSO A.A. Guideline: Internet (MG-18)
- (D) October 2019 – SETA Website Guidelines

Appendix B: G Suite Groups, Drives, and Email Architecture

To be published on website soon...