Email Norms

Email is a critical communication tool used to conduct business within OCG both internally among staff and with OCG's campus partners, including other units, departments, PIs, DRAs and sponsors. The following norms help promote the effectiveness of email in OCG:

Culture of Responsiveness

OCG has a culture of responsiveness that is a significant contributor to the credibility and service oriented reputation OCG has achieved. As such, OCG staff endeavor to acknowledge emails within one to two business days.

- A full response is not required within that timeframe – just a brief acknowledgement such as, '*I'm working on this*' or '*I see your question but I am unable to respond until [timeframe]*.'

- If an OCG colleague has not responded to one of your emails in a timely manner, consider following up with a Slack or Teams message, or a Zoom, Teams or telephone call.

Email Practices

OCG follows the practices outlined on the Email Anatomy infographic (page two of this document). In addition to these email practices, there are specific expectations related to OCG's business needs:

- When a proposal or award is the topic of the email, identify the PI Last Name; Sponsor; Proposal Number, Award Number and/or Project Number in the subject line.

- When there is a deadline for a complete response, include this deadline in the subject line and body of the email.

- Use "CC" and "Reply All" with care. Do not copy a sponsor on internal discussions. Likewise, be conscientious of who needs to be involved in internal back-and-forth email communications. For example, when sorting out a situation, only include those needed in that discussion before looping others back into the conversation, such as a PI, department contact, etc.

- Use an email signature block that includes title, contact and availability information. It is especially important to the success of OCG's hybrid work model to provide transparency on availability and best ways to connect.

- Out of office messages with backup contact(s) should be used when away from work or unable to respond to email.

Content Considerations

Research administration and the work of OCG is complex and not always easy to explain or digest in written form. Consider your recipient(s):

- What is the knowledge or expertise level of the recipient(s)? Be careful with assumptions about what people know and understand to the level of detail as you or vice versa.

- Is this a complex issue that may be better handled with a meeting and then a follow-up email? If there are more than two back-and-forth email questions/interactions on a topic, consider a meeting or call.

- Is it a quick question that may be better asked through Slack or Teams messages?

- Are there dynamics or factors involved where interaction through a phone, Zoom or Teams call may be more efficient and effective?

- Tone matters and shows up through word choices, punctuation, brevity, lengthy lectures, etc.

EMAIL ANATOMY

Your email is a reflection of YOU.

SUBJECT LINES

Clear as possible

Explain the purpose

Match the content

It's OK to change a subject line of replies or forwards to match the current state of the content thread

Use Keywords:

DEADLINE: If there is one, include it
ACTION: Recipients must take action
INFO: No response required
REQUEST: Seeks permission/approval
SIGN: Requires recipient's signature

CONTENT

Bottom line up front

KISS - Keep It Short & Simple

Just Right - Not too long or too short

Additional Considerations:

Keep tabs on your tone

Know your audience

Use the appropriate level of formality

Be aware of cultural differences in communication

Be cautious with humor

Treat confidential information as such

Be alert to dashing off incomplete thoughts that lack context for the sake of brevity

TO:

Recipients who are expected or required to act or respond to the message

Good Idea:

Add your recipients last

CC:

Recipients who only need to be kept in the loop and do not need to take action or respond

Ask Yourself:

Will those Cc'd derive actual value from receiving this email?

BCC:

Used only to protect the identities of a long list of recipients

Ask Yourself:

What are my motives or intentions when using Bcc?

REPLY ALL

Think twice before hitting 'reply all' and adding to Inbox Spam

Ask Yourself:

Does everyone on the email chain need to know my response?

SIGNATURES

Take the time to be nice - add a salutation and courteous closing

Signature Block:

Include your title, unit, logo and phone number at a minimum

TIMELY RESPONSE

Respond to all emails within a given time frame (48 hours if possible), even if to only acknowledge receipt and set the expectation for a complete response

FORMATTING TIPS & TRICKS

Avoid 'yelling' in ALL CAPS

Use exclamation points sparingly!!!

Type in complete sentences

Proofread and spell check

Use emoticons sparingly

Use standard fonts

"Zip" or compress large attachments or add links to files

Watch the wall of text

Scannable is good - use headers and bullet points where appropriate