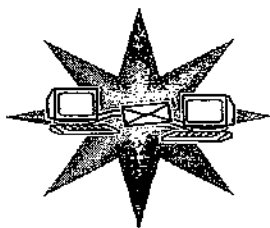# CHAPTER THREE:
USING TECHNOLOGY TO PROMOTE PUBLIC POLICY

- ◆ Using E-mail Effectively
- ◆ Spotting E-mail hoaxes
- ◆ Public Policy Resources on the Internet

Using E-mail Effectively

Whether you are a new or a long-time e-mail user, understanding more about e-mail etiquette and listserv use will help you get the most out of this invaluable communication tool.

Netiquette
Although e-mail is fundamentally different from traditional paper-based or verbal communication, rules of e-mail etiquette, commonly known as "netiquette," are no less important than those we follow in other modes of communication. How we write in e-mail—particularly in places like listservs—affects how people perceive us, our opinions, and our character. In short, to those who know us only through e-mail, we are what we post. In non-e-mail communication we wouldn't shout at a friend or coworker in conversation, send junk mail or rumored fact to acquaintances (just in case they are interested), or send a letter to a friend with a few extra pages of irrelevant text. However people do the online equivalent of these things every day. Extending common courtesies shown to others in our everyday lives *offline* to those with whom we interact *online* can go a long way toward making our communications much more effective.

Keep these basic rules in mind:
1. **DO NOT TYPE IN ALL CAPS** for more than one word or subject heading. This is perceived as SHOUTING.
2. **Include a brief but informative subject line** that indicates the contents of the message.
3. **Keep paragraphs short**, and always insert a blank line between them.
4. **Do not use text styles (like bold or italic) or text colors in mailing list messages**, many people will not see them and may even see HTML tags instead.
5. **Always put comments at the top of the message** when forwarding messages.
6. **Quote sparingly**, particularly on listservs. In most cases it is unnecessary to include large portions of the message to which you are replying in your response.
7. **Carefully consider what you write.** Although e-mail feels quick and informal, it is a permanent record and easily forwarded to others.
8. **Be aware of how your reader might perceive your message, and use emoticons (smileys) when possible to help convey a tone of voice :-)** E-mail is more conversational than paper-based media, but just like a traditional letter, it lacks contextual clues such as vocal inflections, gestures, or facial expressions. Your correspondent may have difficulty telling if you are serious or kidding, happy or sad, frustrated or euphoric. Sarcasm is especially dangerous in email.
9. **Do not forward information indiscriminately.** Inbox-clogging chain letters, virus warnings, and hoaxes (also known as spam) consume recipients' valuable time and are the online equivalent of junk mail. Such messages are *never* appropriate for listservs. In the case of virus warnings and other classic chain e-mails, the content is almost always unfounded. *If you cannot verify a message through a credible source, do not forward it.*
10. **Always read over your e-mail before you send it** and use spell check if available.

Netiquette Especially For Listservs:

1. *Always* **read the guidelines that you receive** when you become a member of an e-mail list, and keep them on file for future reference. Guidelines usually include procedures and rules for posting to the list, information on how to unsubscribe, and information on whom to contact if you have questions or problems.

2. **Do not reply to the entire list unless you think your mail would be helpful and of interest to the majority.** Remember that on many listservs (including the SPPC listserv), using either "reply" or "reply all" will send your message to the entire list.

3. **Avoid "junk" postings** such as:
   - "Me-too" posts sent by well-meaning list members replying only to convey that they agree with a message or have had a similar experience.
   - "Unsubscribe me" messages mistakenly sent to the whole list by subscribers who did not read the instructions for leaving the list or updating addresses.
   - Congratulations messages that appear after a member of the list has mentioned some milestone or personal triumph. Again, send these in private e-mail.
   - Never forward a personal e-mail to a discussion group without first getting permission from the author.

Additional Resources on E-mail and Netiquette

http://www.everythingemail.com - An award winning, comprehensive guide to e-mail use, including tips and an indispensable glossary of e-mail terms (http://www.everythingemail.com/email_glossary.html)

http://www.webfoot.com/advice/email.top.html#intro - A Beginner's Guide to Effective E-mail. Consider this an e-mail style guide, with extensive discussion of how e-mail differs from other forms of communication and how to take these differences into consideration when writing. Includes information and examples on context, format, layout, intonation, formality, greetings, and signatures.

http://email.about.com/library/series/blmailinglists_series.htm - About.com offers a series of articles on mailing lists, covering types of lists, using lists, and creating your own.

Spotting E-mail Hoaxes

The High Price of Hoaxes

As you read this, there are hundreds of virus hoaxes, misleading messages, and just plain e-junk circulating in cyberspace, making the rounds, coming soon to an inbox near you. We have all received them—false security and health scares, fake legislative alerts, urban legends retold with a twist, supposed free goods or easy money just for forwarding a message to everyone you know. While some of these messages are obviously hoaxes, some are less apparent, and we have all been taken in by them at one time or another. E-mail hoaxes and junk e-mail are becoming so prevalent that many consider them as much of a threat to system resources as viruses—the cumulative time spent deleting (or forwarding!) hoaxes and spam, day after day, and across millions of computer users adds up!

All that said, it is a very good idea to be skeptical about information when it arrives in your inbox. Read on for some tips and resources on how to identify and deal with hoaxes, scams, and time wasters that you may receive.

General Tips

- Virtually any chain email you receive (i.e., any message forwarded multiple times) is more likely to be false than true. Be skeptical.

- Hoaxers usually try every means available to make their lies believable—e.g., mimicking a journalistic style, attributing the text to a "legitimate" source.

- Be especially wary of health-related rumors. Most importantly, never act on this type of rumor without first verifying its accuracy with your doctor or other reliable source.

How to Spot an Email Hoax *(From http://urbanlegends.about.com/index.htm)*

Without researching the factual claims made in a forwarded email there's no sure way to tell it if it's a hoax, but here you'll find common signs to watch for:

1. Note whether the text was actually written by the person who sent it to you. If not, be skeptical.

2. Look for the telltale phrase, "Forward this to everyone you know."

3. Look for statements like "This is not a hoax" or "This is not an urban legend." They usually mean the opposite of what they say.

4. Look for overly emphatic language, the frequent use of UPPERCASE LETTERS and multiple exclamation points!!!!!!! If the message seems geared more to persuade than to inform, be suspicious. Hoaxers are out to push emotional buttons.

5. If the message purports to give you extremely important information that you've never heard of before or seen elsewhere in legitimate venues, be suspicious.

6. Read carefully and think critically about what the message says, looking for logical inconsistencies, violations of common sense and obviously false claims.

7. Look for subtle or not-so-subtle jokes, indications that the author is pulling your leg.

8. Check for references to outside sources. Hoaxes will not typically name any, nor link to Websites with corroborating information.

9. Check to see if the message has been debunked by websites that cover Internet hoaxes (see below).

10. If you can not verify the facts, do not forward the message!

Additional Resources on E-mail Hoaxes and Viruses

http://urbanlegends.about.com/cs/nethoaxes/index.htm - About.com net lore rumors, hoaxes and urban legends site, containing a constantly updated, categorized index of Internet hoaxes, rumors, chain letters, jokes and email urban legends.

http://urbanlegends.about.com/cs/virushoaxes - About.com resources on computer virus hoaxes.

http://hoaxbusters.ciac.org/HBHoaxInfo.html#identify - A very informative page compiled by the U.S. Dept. of Energy's Computer Incident Advisory Capability. It also contains listings of the most frequently sighted hoaxes and chain letters.

http://www.snopes2.com/index.html - Urban legends reference pages, containing resource information and listings of current hoaxes by category.

Public Policy Resources on the Internet

Track Federal Legislation

Thomas Legislative Information on the Internet   **http://thomas.loc.gov**
Thomas is a service of the Library of Congress, and allows you to search for legislation by bill number or keyword. The site also includes links to Congress and the Legislative Agencies, the legislative session calendar, and information on the legislative process.

Track State Legislation

The National Conference of Sate Legislatures (NCSL)   **www.ncsl.org**
The NCSL site contains links to the websites of state legislatures. From the home page, click on "Public User." Once the page has loaded choose "State Legislatures" from the navigation bar. From this page you can access links to state legislative websites.

Information on Education Issues

National Coalition for Women and   **www.ncwge.org**
Girls in Education (NCWGE)
NCWGE is a nonprofit organization of more than 50 organizations, including AAUW, dedicated to improving educational opportunities for girls and women.

National Education Association (NEA)   **www.nea.org**
NEA is America's oldest and largest organization committed to advancing public education.

American Federation of Teachers (AFT)   **www.aft.org**
The AFT represents one million teachers, school support staff, higher education faculty and staff, health care professionals and state and municipal employees.

Information on Reproductive Health Issues

The Kaiser Family Foundation website   **www.kaisernetwork.org**
The Kaiser Family Foundation site is an excellent resource to track reproductive health issues in your state and nationally. The site provides a daily reproductive health report, webcasts and transcripts of important hearings and events, and a wealth of other great resources.

NARAL Pro-Choice America   **www.naral.org**
Learn more about legislation impacting reproductive health care and rights on the NARAL website.

The Alan Guttmacher Institute   www.agi-usa.org/
The Alan Guttmacher Institute (AGI) is a non-profit organization focused on sexual and
reproductive health research, policy analysis and public education. AGI publishes *Family
Planning Perspectives, International Family Planning Perspectives, The Guttmacher Report on
Public Policy* and special reports on sexual and reproductive health and rights. The Institute's
mission is to protect the reproductive choices of all women and men in the United States and
throughout the world.

The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)   www.unfpa.org/
UNFPA, which began operations in 1969, is the largest international source of population
assistance. UNFPA's mission is to expand access to family planning and maternal health care
around the world, and it currently provides critical family planning services in 156 countries
worldwide. UNFPA programs also help expand women's access to education, health services,
and employment, and reduce reliance on abortion.

Information on Civil Rights

Leadership Conference on Civil Rights (LCCR)   www.civilrights.org
For information on civil rights issues such as hate crimes prevention, and judicial nominations,
visit the LCCR website.

People for the American Way (PFAW)   www.pfaw.org
People For the American Way organizes and mobilizes Americans to fight for fairness, justice, civil
rights and the freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution.

Information on Social Security Reform

National Committee to Preserve   www.ncpssm.org
Social Security and Medicare
The National Committee to Preserve Social Security and Medicare was founded in 1982 to serve
as an advocate for the landmark federal programs of Social Security and Medicare and for all
Americans who seek a healthy, productive and secure retirement.

National Council of Women's Organizations (NCWO)   www.women4socialsecurity.org
Women and Social Security Project
The NCWO is a nonpartisan network of over 100 women's organizations, including AAUW,
representing more than six million women. In 1998, NCWO formed a Women and Social Security Task
Force to address the critical issue of Social Security reform and to help policy makers understand
women's stake in this crucial issue.

The Older Womens' League   www.owl-national.org
OWL is a national membership organization that works to improve the status and quality of life of
midlife and older women. OWL works to ensure that all women have the tools with which to build their
own economic security today and in the future.