

E-mail can be a great tool for groups working together across geography or across conflicting work schedules. But, as we've all learned, it can also sometimes seem like a barrier to convivial human relations. Therefore, it can be very worthwhile to periodically reflect on how well or poorly we ourselves are using e-mail.

## **WILPF U.S. E-Mail Protocol**

### **1. Tone**

For both formal and informal emails (see 7 below), imagine you are speaking directly to the person(s) addressed or referred to, especially if you are saying something that might be construed negatively. We are human beings, not functionaries, and our experiences, priorities, values, assumptions, and feelings differ. *Tone in an email is much different that tone face to face. Think of two of the guidelines that we agreed to for speaking at Board meetings: "make I statements" and "respect everyone's opinion."*

### **2. "Steeping"**

When you have finished your email, take a break, a cup of tea, a deep breath. Then read your email again and decide if you really want and need to send it as it stands. Edit! \*If you are writing an email on an emotional or heated topic-or if you are in such a state-it is a good idea to let it sit overnight before reviewing and sending it!\* *If you have a partner, have her or him read it for objectivity. If you do not have a partner, share the email with someone with whom you are comfortable.*

### **3. Formal Apology**

If an inflammatory email is sent out, demeaning one or more persons, realize that you not only offend those who are stated in the email, but you also offend all those who read it. An apology must be sent to all parties concerned.

### **4. Subject Lines**

Use clear and specific subject lines, with deadlines when appropriate.

a. One email should address only one topic (and related questions, see 9 below). Please do not "embed" questions deep in an email. They can be included in an introductory summary (see also 9) or put into a separate email with a distinctive subject line (and separate address list, as appropriate).

b. If you are replying (please also see 4 below), use the same subject line (to preserve the "thread") only if you are still addressing the same topic. If you are developing a new but related sub-topic, add an appropriate word or phrase to the original subject line.

### **5. Address Lists (to, cc, bcc)**

Please make conscious and clear choices of addresses, including the choice of

WILPF e-mail lists (such as board, branches, finance, etc.).

a. It is sometimes useful for a sender to indicate if recipients are to "reply to all" or "privately." "Reply to all" would be the best choice if the exchange is moving toward a decision among the recipients as a group.

b. It is rarely useful to bring larger and larger groups of recipients into an on-going e-mail exchange, as misunderstandings of the purpose of the exchange are likely to ensue.

c. In the interest of transparency, please avoid the use of bcc.

## **6. Reply and Reply to All**

Please use these functions carefully. Change the subject line and/or delete all or part of the original address list as appropriate to your response. Please do not use "reply to all" when that is not needed for the email content. It may be useful to delete all or most of the text of the prior emails to which you are replying, so as not to produce overly long emails.

## **7. Formal or Informal**

Is your email formal or informal? Formal emails are discussions, analyses, facts, or reports on Board/Committee business and contain information that recipients have a responsibility to digest and absorb. Informal ones are personal comments, casual thoughts, etc. The tone of your email, as well as the size of the address list, should and will usually indicate whether the email is formal or informal. (Informal emails usually go to a smaller number of people.) When unclear, please indicate in the first sentence, since some of us may be so pressed for time that we must skip informal emails.

## **8. Consensus via E-mail**

In general, the Board will try to avoid making substantive decisions via e-mail. When a decision requiring consensus must be made via e-mail, all board members will be expected to contribute either affirmatively, or with reservations, stand asides or blocks. This also applies to Committees.

## **9. Length, Conciseness**

Write as briefly as possible, esp. in formal emails. (Please see 7 above.) Demonstrate that you value the time of your correspondents.

## **10. Questions and Deadlines**

Please indicate if you want answers and, if so, what - precisely - your questions are. Deadlines should whenever possible, be indicated in the subject line. Please allow a reasonable length of time on deadlines! If time is short, please explain why.

### **11. Attachments**

If you choose to attach documents, please avoid making them too large and try to write them in the most accessible program, because some of us might have slow modems and old programs! Whenever possible, please also copy the text of the attachment into the body of the email (or into a separate email with the appropriate subject line).

### **12. Summaries, subheadings**

If you have written a long email, an introductory summary can be very helpful in guiding the reader. Subheadings of parts in the body of the email can also facilitate reference and understanding.

### **13. Forwards**

Do not forward informal emails without the permission of the sender. Formal Board emails-which are, more or less, part of the public record-should be forwarded with discretion. Preserve the integrity of decision-making processes within the Board or a Committee by sharing only those decisions arrived at by consensus, and not the candid discussion leading up to them. When one copies and pastes excerpts from someone's email into a new message and distributes it to new recipients, it is a form of "forwarding" and should be done only according to the guidelines set out above.