IATSE Communications Department
Email & Digital Organizing Resources

We're glad you've started using Action Network!

It is a powerful tool whether you're using it for day-to-day communications with your membership, or for activism and organizing. **Regardless of how you think you'll use Action Network, these resources and suggestions can help you run a sophisticated and polished email program.** This guide is best suited for locals who are already set up on Action Network, or have prior experience with email platforms.

The AFL-CIO has excellent resources for digital activism/organizing. You can view all of them here: iatse.co/aflciodigital. We've distilled some of that information into the following document. Information about *how* to use Action Network is available on their Help and FAQ pages.

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Feedback & Questions

Please send feedback and questions to comms@iatse.net.

1. Email Writing Tips

1. Be professional. Sending out an email is a way of officially communicating with your membership whether it's about an upcoming meeting or a political activism alert. Just like Facebook and Twitter, emails reflect your local, so make sure it's professional by double-checking tone and subject matter before hitting "Send."

2. Proofread. Behind-the-scenes work demands attention to detail: we iron and store our costumes precisely, we replace burnt-out lights, we count tickets carefully, and we coil our cables the same way, every time. Details matter on set, on stage, or on screen, and they matter when you're officially communicating with your membership.

By running through the email checklist we've included in this guide (section 3: Email Blasts: Check Before Sending), you'll ensure correct spelling, grammar, punctuation, evenly-spaced paragraphs, and functional links.

3. Get to the point. When you open an email, do you quickly scan it, and then read it more thoroughly? Do you stop paying attention after the third paragraph? While YOU know that the email you're about to send is important, *try to hit the main points as soon as possible*. And remember that over half of emails are now opened on a mobile device first – so how will your email look on a cell phone?

4. Keep it simple. Keep the email *content* simple (see Tip #3), and avoid adding too many graphics, links, and font colors/styles/sizes.

5. Stay consistent. We've standardized many things in our email program, from **bolding links** to the way an email is signed off:

> In Solidarity,
>
> **Name**
> *Job Title*

This consistency maintains our brand, eliminates guesswork, and strengthens Tip #1: it simply looks more professional. Create a cheat-sheet with your formatting guidelines so you don't forget, and make sure that everyone on staff who uses Action Network understands the guidelines.

2. Union Messaging

In 2015, the AFL-CIO, working with ASO Communications and Lake Research, conducted a study to find the most effective language when discussing unions and progressive politics. Here's what they found – try using this language in your petitions, letter-writing campaigns, and other activism-related communications!

REPLACE	EMBRACE
Collective bargaining	Negotiating collectively
Labor movement / labor union	Working people / unions of working people
Joining a union	Joining in union
Bargaining unit	Women and men
Union members	Working people in unions
Exploit / harm / mistreat	Require we do more with less
Workers get / receive / fight / demand	Working people negotiate / earn
Union contract	Negotiated contract
Improve wages and working conditions	Set standards / change the rules / create better workplaces
Raise wages / better wages and benefits	People who work for a living ought to earn a living
Economic opportunity	Economic stability
Bargain(ing)	Negotiate together / speak up for one another
Rules / economy is rigged	Rules are manipulated
Deserve dignity and respect	Able to provide for family
Good for the economy	Good for the nation / families / working people
Economic inequality / gap between top and bottom	Economy off balance / too much wealth in too few hands
Members, workers	Working people
Falling wages / wages have fallen	Employers choose to pay less / denying your pay
Raise a/your family	Sustain a/your family
Financial industry / big banks	Corporations / corporate CEOs
Low paid is bad	Get paid for the work you do
Enact policies	Change the rules

For example, replacing "bargain" with "negotiate together" gives the idea of a group of people in solidarity – a union! – while "bargain" reminds people of cheap prices. Both mean the same thing but frame the message differently for readers.

Remember, these are suggestions – use language that works best for your local and members.

Along with the specific Replace/Embrace language, the AFL-CIO came to these conclusions about the type of language we should use – ***more personal, more concrete, and more active***:

- Provide an **aspirational call** to better lives that goes beyond purely financial issues
- Embrace and lead with **progressive values** like family, freedom, and fairness
- Describe **real experiences:** "can't make ends meet," vs. abstractions: "wage stagnation"
- Assert that **human action** deliberately created problems and that only deliberate human action can fix them
- Name problems in an **active voice** – "CEOs decided" rather than identify them passively – "incomes fell"
- Focus on the **outcomes**, not the policies: "more time to care for a sick child" vs. "paid leave legislation"
- Emphasize **"helping the family"** vs. "growing the economy"

* Credit for this section goes to the AFL-CIO's "Working. For A Better Life" resource sheet, 2016.

3. Email Blasts: Check Before Sending

Check it before you send it! Before every email blast, the Communications Department runs through a checklist for quality control. Below is an annotated version of the checklist, which takes about 15 minutes to complete.

If you'd like to use it, you may amend it for your own usage – here's a version that you can download to edit or use as-is: iatse.co/emailblastchecklist (**File > Download as > Microsoft Word [.docx]**).

If you have questions about the checklist, email comms@iatse.net.
_____

EMAIL: **RECIPIENTS:**   **DATE:**

SENDER NAME / REPLY ADDRESS
__ Does the sender make sense for the given email?
> *Is it an official announcement coming from the local president, or news from a committee? The sender name may change depending on the content – or not, if you'd like everything coming from the same person (for example, the local president).*

__ Does the sender match the name in the signature of the email?
__ Is the reply address correct?
> *If someone replies to the email, whose inbox should their reply land in?*

SUBJECT LINE
__ Did you read the subject line one word at a time?
__ Did you make sure the subject line is not TYPED IN CAPS LOCK?
> *Check out our Netiquette Guide to learn more about caps lock: iatse.co/unionsocialmedia*

__ Has the subject line been spell-checked in Microsoft Word?
__ If a date or time is listed in the subject line, does it match the information in the email?
__ Check how the subject line, sender, and any words look before the email is opened, and flag anything that could be taken out of context.

WRAPPER / TEMPLATE
__ Is the template/wrapper correct for the message and sender?
> *Your locals might opt to have different templates ("wrappers") for different senders – we have wrappers for the International, the Women's Committee, and the Young Workers Committee:*
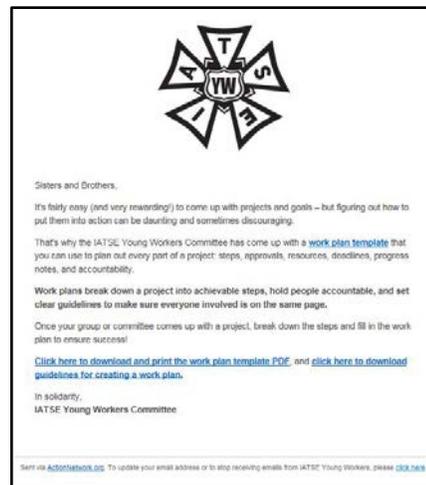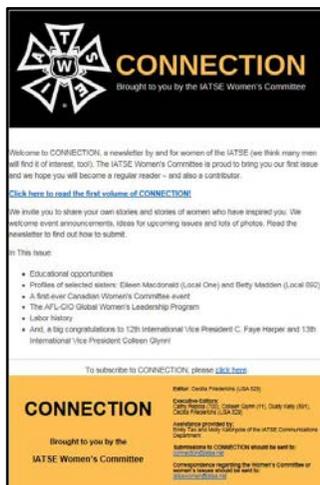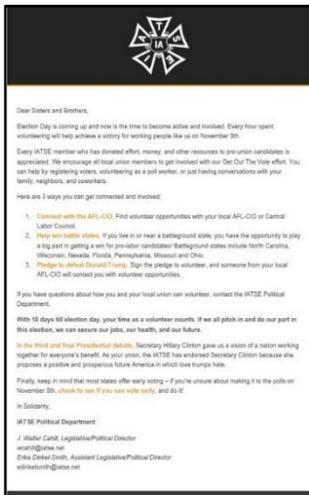
__ Is there an unsubscribe link? Check that the link works and directs to the proper destination.

__ Do the social media icons/links lead to the correct pages?

EMAIL BODY

__ Are paragraphs and spaces formatted consistently?

> *Are there double spaces between some paragraphs, and single spaces between others? Make sure they're uniform.*

__ Read the entire email carefully, one word at a time. Check grammar and usage. Note any odd language or awkward phrasing. Check for special characters.

__ Does the greeting make sense for the audience?

> *i.e. **Dear Sisters and Brothers** vs. **Dear Young Workers***

__ Is there anything in the text that could be taken out of context to attack the local or union?

__ Are commas and other punctuation used correctly?

__ Are the dashes formatted consistently throughout?

> *We use – , not - or — , and add a single space before and after each dash.*

__ Are the dates and times correct?

__ Are they written in proper, consistent format? (e.g., 9:00AM ET; October 26th; October 26th, 2016)

__ Are all local numbers, officer titles, personal names, location names, personal stories, statistics, and substantive factual assertions verified?

__ Is every proper name in the email spelled correctly?

__ Is there a "Name" sign off in addition to the full name, title, and department?

__ If a member story/quote is in the email, has it been ok'd by the member and local?

__ Has the email been spell-checked? Paste the entire email into a Word document and run spell check.

LINKS

__ Click on every link. Do they work and take you to the proper destination?

__ Are the words in any naked URL and hyperlinked text spelled correctly?

> *Naked URL: "Visit our website: www.iatse.net"*
>
> *Hyperlinked text: "Click here to visit our website." www.iatse.net is linked into the "Click here" text, making it look cleaner and encouraging action from the reader.*

__ Are all links bolded?

> *We bold links to make them as visible as possible, while others underline them.*

GRAPHICS

__ Do the graphics make sense for the email?

__ Check that the graphic's placement in the email doesn't cut off any text or distort the email.

__ If a graphic is hyperlinked, does it lead to the correct destination?

__ Did you check spelling and grammar of any words and sentences in the graphic?

LANDING PAGES

__ Does the landing page make sense for the email?

> *Landing page: the web page you arrive at when clicking a link.*

__ Have the header, all text on the page, and any graphics with text been spell-checked?

__ Are the line breaks and formatting correct on the landing page? Check for special characters.

__ Complete the action. Does it resolve to the proper next step?

> *"Action" could be a sign-up page, petition, letter-writing campaign, and so on.*

__ *If applicable*: Checklist any auto-responder email you receive: Spelling, grammar, formatting, links.

__ *If applicable*: Check to make sure the daisy chain is correct and all pages make sense (even the final thank-you page).

4. Digital Campaigns: Petitions, Letter-Writing Campaigns, and Micro-Sites

Petitions and letter-writing campaigns are Action Network features available to local unions. Micro-sites are made with other platforms like WordPress or Squarespace.

Petitions

1. Tell a story and move the reader to action. Your petition should be personal and inspire whoever reads it to act. Tell the story, name the stakes, and clearly state your target: who has the power to change the problem, and why. When you're writing a headline ("Tell Senator X to Vote No on SB 15!"), keep it short, active, and attention-grabbing, and always state the solution clearly. Try writing a few different headlines to get your ideas going.

2. …But keep it simple. Don't bog down your petition story with endless facts and figures, and try not to write more than 200 words. Use a 3-paragraph structure: introduction paragraph (be direct and clear), a supporting paragraph that gives a bit more detail, and a closing statement that reiterates your argument. Imagine if you had to give a quick elevator pitch about your campaign – what would you say?

3. Use consistent messaging. If you've got a full campaign going, stick with 2-3 main statements (or talking points) and refer to them when possible. This helps ensure a cohesive campaign.

4. Do not exaggerate or lie. It might feel tempting to exaggerate the truth, but this will only hurt you in the end.

Letter-Writing Campaign

In Action Network, a letter-writing campaign is an opportunity to quickly reach one or multiple targets. The letter-writing action on Action Network doesn't send "snail mail" – it sends emails, so you'll need your target's email address. You can use this feature to send emails to a primary or secondary target in an organizing drive, a politician during a legislative fight, or in any other type of campaign when you think the target needs to hear from multiple people.

When it comes to the letter your members will send, you have a few options:

1. Activist can write their own letter. You'll include letter-writing tips, so they won't be flying solo – these tips should be your main talking points that you're using throughout your campaign.

Pros	Cons
They can share their personal story, which may have greater impact on the target.	Some people may drop off because they don't want to write a letter.
	While you can provide writing tips, you don't have complete control over what people write.

2. Activist can edit a letter that you've pre-written.

Pros	Cons
Your letter-writing tips will likely remain, giving you a greater chance of control over the narrative.	Writer might ignore tips.
Gives writer flexibility and the opportunity to add their personal story.	
Less pressure for writer – they are not starting from scratch.	

3. Activist will send a letter that you've pre-written, without the ability to edit.

Pros	Cons
You have total control over the message.	Less personal.
No pressure for writer – they just click "Send."	

Take all the pros and cons into consideration when you're setting up your campaign.

Much like writing a petition, your letter should be punchy, direct, consistent with your campaign messaging, and proofread!

Once the writer clicks "Send" they are brought to a "Thank you" page. On this page, you can simply say "Thanks for sending a letter!" – or you can include links to a Facebook page, Twitter, website, or anything else that's related to your campaign.

Micro-Sites

Often, a petition or letter-writing campaign is part of a larger organizing campaign or activism effort. In these instances, you might create a "micro-site," or a website made up of a few pages that supplement either an on-the-ground activity, or an existing website. Creating a micro-site can be time-intensive, especially if you don't have much experience with making websites – but it's a great skill to learn.

In 2014, the International Union of Painters and Allied Trades (IUPAT) ran a helpful training about micro-sites and provided this list of questions to ask before you decide to create one for your campaign:

- What is the lifespan of the site?
- Who will create it? Outsource or in-house?
- Who will maintain it? Outsource or in-house?
- Do I have the budget necessary for the creation and maintenance of this site?
- Do I have the time necessary for the creation and maintenance of this site?
- Do I need legal counsel for my purpose? Do I have easy access to legal counsel?
- What is the site's relationship to the campaign?
- Who are the stakeholders/organizations/people involved and are they all on board?
- How will content be generated?
- What actions do I want the visitor to perform?
- What are the goals for this site?

5. Additional Resources

Action Network Tutorials and FAQs

iatse.co/actionnetworkhelp

Action Network's tutorial and FAQ section offers information about how to use the platform – how to set up emails, petitions, create lists, and so on.

AFL-CIO Digital Training Modules and Resources

iatse.co/aflciodigital

#1u Digital is a training program intended to give you the skills to be awesome at digital technologies and platforms, equipping the labor movement and our allies with cutting-edge techniques and best practices in digital advocacy. Spearheaded by the AFL-CIO Digital Strategies Department, it's open to anyone in the labor movement who wants to organize and advocate for workers online with excellence.

IATSE Activism Manual

iatse.co/unionactivism

The manual discusses what forms activism can take, helps locals to identify potential member activists, and then offers assistance on how to conduct campaigns. To keep things manageable, the elements of a campaign are broken down, and the tools to help ensure success are covered. We hope that our local union leaders can use this guide as a tool to make their local an activist local. This guide is also available in French.

IATSE Social Media Guide

iatse.co/unionsocialmedia

As a response to the increased interest local unions and members have expressed in social media, we are happy to provide this IATSE Social Media Guide as an introduction to Facebook and Twitter, and how it can be used as a professional tool for a local union or member. Debuted in 2014, the guide has been updated yearly to include new screenshots and information.

Feedback & Questions

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