

ACCE Communications Manifesto

Our commitment to clarity, timeliness, and respect in every interaction—inside and outside our organization.

Purpose

We believe communication is not just the exchange of information—it is the foundation of trust, collaboration, and impact. This manifesto defines our shared expectations so that everyone in our association can work efficiently, respectfully, and in alignment with our mission. We want our communications to be timely, transparent and effective. We don't want our internal communications to cause undue stress. Most importantly, having protocols reinforces systems that ensure we're practicing our values.

1. Message Clarity & Prioritization

To reduce confusion and wasted time, every message should make its purpose and urgency clear.

- **The top of the email (or brief subject line) should include clarity on urgency:**
 - FYI – No action required; Can also use low priority denotation
 - No response needed can also be clearly stated
 - Specific deadline if a response is needed by a select date
 - Urgent – Immediate attention required; Can also use High Importance (!) denotation
 - Please use this for urgent messages, only. If overused, the opposite effect will occur. If you use this denotation, please explain why your message is urgent.
 - If you are copied or BCCed, you don't need to respond unless noted in the email
- **Body:**
 - Clarity: State the action, decision, or information needed.
 - Accountability: If multiple individuals are included on an email, state who is responsible for which next steps.
- **Culture of questions:** Everyone is encouraged to ask questions or clarification if communication from anyone (in any form) is not clear. For example, if information is unclear during a team meeting, don't hesitate to ask questions at the meeting, or do so afterwards directly with the staffer in charge of the project. Conversations don't end when a meeting adjourns. With that, avoid "meetings after meetings" where groups complain or ruminate about an effort. Bring challenges you see directly to the group or project lead.
- **Deliver info in sections:** Long updates in written or verbal form are often hard to follow. For long written materials, consider clearly labeled sections/headers with descriptive titles. For long verbal updates, break them into multiple components, where you stop to ask questions between

sections.

- **Share the why:** If something is on a tight timeline, explaining why is helpful. Likewise, relevant background information can often drive better outcomes.
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2. Responsiveness & Timeliness

- **Internal communications:**

The onus for response expectations is on the sender. Emails should include expectations and deadlines where appropriate (see section: Message Clarity & Prioritization)

Emails that require response but do not include a deadline should be acknowledged ideally within **1 business day**, within **2 business days** being the upper bound of response time. A full response may take longer, but acknowledgement should be sent noting that a deeper response is in the works, with an estimated turn-around time.

Internal phone calls or texts should be responded to within **1 business day**.

It's understandable if you need more time, just acknowledge that quickly. We don't want expectations to add unnecessary pressure.

Response times should be extended when a staff member is on travel, PTO or other leave.

- **External communications:**

Emails: Acknowledgement and/or response should ideally be sent within **1 business day**, with **2 business days** being the upper bound of response time.

Phone calls: Should be acknowledged or responded to within **1 business day**. In extenuating circumstances, **2 business days** should be the upper bound of response time.

- **Co-creating and managing deadlines:**

Departments have pre-existing and competing priorities. When setting deadlines:

- Ask for input before confirming due dates
- Be realistic, not setting arbitrary & quick deadlines
- Negotiate timelines collaboratively to avoid unnecessary stress or bottlenecks
- Document agreed-upon dates in shared tools (e.g., project tracking documents)
- Build in ample time for team members to review and respond to materials. One week's time is a good starting point, understanding some efforts may require shorter turnaround times, if mutually agreed upon.
- If circumstances change, re-confirm timelines with all involved parties
- Allow wiggle room where possible for unexpected issues that may arise

- ***As a team, we should not be unnecessarily burdening other team members with a need for last-minute support***
 - If you've waited until the last minute to seek feedback from a staff member, your fire should not become someone else's fire. Anything with less than 3 days' feedback, that does not have a justifiable reason, is a short turnaround time. Repeated issues in this area should follow our accountability policy.
 - While unexpected needs arise, be realistic and ask if bandwidth is available before assuming so.
 - Include reasons why this request is coming to someone at the last minute
- For truly urgent matters, use channels designed for rapid response (phone or text).
- If you cannot meet a deadline, inform stakeholders as soon as possible—not after the due date.
- Communications that do not need input from you – ex. an FYI email – does not require a response. You can send a thumbs up, or thanks, but don't feel obligated to do so. In fact, you can help keep inboxes uncluttered.
- Be mindful and aware of time zone differences when responding (or awaiting a response).
- If you are connecting an external party to a staff member, make that direct connection if you know definitively that it's in that staff member's wheelhouse. If you're unsure, connect with the staffer first before sending an external contact to a team member.
 - When you copy someone who is out of office, note in the email that they're out and when they'll be back, to set expectation for why there's a delay.

3. Choosing the Right Channel

We match the channel to the urgency, complexity, and sensitivity of the message.

Channel	Best for	Avoid for
Email	Non-urgent updates, formal records, detailed information, multi-person threads, attachments & documents, updates	Urgent issues
Teams	Quick collaboration, updates, informal Q&A	Sensitive topics, recallable info
Text Message	Urgent issues during business hours (e.g., last-minute meeting change)	Routine info
Phone Call	Complex topics, sensitive conversations, urgent decisions, resolving misunderstandings, when you have multiple questions	Routine status updates
Meeting/Zoom	Relationship building, brainstorming, complex negotiations, teamwork	Simple FYIs or status updates

- Communications regarding deadlines, that include attachments or critical information, or share information that needs to be recalled should all be communicated via email. Teams is not suitable for searching or saving information.
- Phone calls are underutilized. Consider calling if there's confusion, conflict, complexity or to better build rapport.
 - If you call someone unexpectedly, please be succinct and respect their time. You don't know what they're in the middle of or what they still have to accomplish in their day.
- Meetings: Little garners frustration faster than hosting a meeting that could've been an email.
 - Use a meeting/zoom for engagement and two-way feedback
 - Share expectations & agendas in advance
 - Carve out only the time necessary to cover meeting topics
 - Be succinct when in a meeting
 - When possible, share advanced material to review one week prior
 - Sharing prompt questions prior to a meeting, which are aimed at outcomes you're seeking, can help drive discussion

4. Choosing the Right Recipient

As a reminder, [this document](#) outlines team member roles and portfolios to ensure you are communicating with individuals who have responsibility for the topic in question.

Below is a list of group emails and who receives them:

Email	Purpose	Recipients/Has Access
accebenefitsteam@acce.org	For all matters related to ACCE Benefits	Stacey Breslin (sbreslin@acce.org) Shonda Norris (snorris@acce.org) Monique Bailey (mbailey@acce.org) Kyle Trent (ktrent@acce.org) Colleen Logan (clogan@acce.org) Christy Merilus (cmerilus@acce.org)
accounting@acce.org	For all other matters for the accounting team	Sabrina Gong (sgong@acce.org) Kim Nguyen (knguyen@acce.org) Jacqueline Cook (jcook@acce.org)
accountspayable@acce.org	For all matters related to payments	Sabrina Gong (sgong@acce.org) Kim Nguyen (knguyen@acce.org) Jacqueline Cook (jcook@acce.org)
ace@acce.org	For all matters related to Awards for Communications Excellence	Tania Kohut (tkohut@acce.org) Monique Bailey (mbailey@acce.org)
askacce@acce.org	For all matters related to AskACCE/Research	Jamie Barbaccia (jbarbaccia@acce.org) Jen Pruden (jpruden@acce.org)

communications@acce.org	For all matters pertinent to the ACCE Communications team	Will Burns (wburns@acce.org) Tania Kohut (tkohut@acce.org) Katie Britt (kbritt@acce.org)
coy@acce.org	For all matters related to Chamber of the Year	Will Burns (wburns@acce.org) Tania Kohut (tkohut@acce.org) Monique Bailey (mbailey@acce.org) JoAnna Dehler (jdehler@acce.org) Jenn Moerman (jmoerman@acce.org) Amy Shields (ashields@acce.org)
membership@acce.org	For all matters related to membership	Ryan Keedy (rkeedy@acce.org) Kevin Jacobs (kjacobs@acce.org)
registration@acce.org	For all matters related to ACCE events	Rumsha Ahmed (rahmed@acce.org) Jenn Moerman (jmoerman@acce.org) Emma Griffin (egriffin@acce.org) Amy Shields (ashields@acce.org)
cce@acce.org	For all matters related to the CCE Program	Ashley Purdy (apurdy@acce.org) Amy Shields (ashields@acce.org)
foundation@acce.org	For all foundation matters	Rumsha Ahmed (rahmed@acce.org) Amy Shields (ashields@acce.org)
education@acce.org	For all matters related to online learning and professional development	Ashley Purdy (apurdy@acce.org)

5. Tone & Professionalism

- Communicate with clarity and courtesy—assume positive intent.
- Be mindful of how tone translates across mediums—especially in short written messages. Avoid one sentence asks – soften the edges to avoid misinterpretation.
- Use plain language, avoiding unnecessary jargon, particularly in external communications. For example, conference acronyms are only relevant for internal audiences who are closely working on those programs.
- When providing feedback, focus on issues, not individuals.
- Video considerations:
 - If speaking up, watch the screen to see if others are planning to speak before you speak up. If there is a pattern of individuals talking over others in video chat, mention it via one-on-one feedback. While this can feel awkward, it is important for building awareness and improving dynamics.
 - If seeking input or questions, give at least a count to eight before moving on. Sometimes people need a moment before responding verbally or in chat.

- External communication considerations: Be thoughtful and don't rush through a message. Check for grammar, punctuation, and include buffer messages - short intros and closing statements – to humanize your message and avoid sounding curt.
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6. Documentation & Transparency

- Keep key documents on the shared drive.
 - All systems and/or process changes should be shared with team members as soon as possible.
 - Cross-functional team meetings should include:
 - Agendas
 - Project tracking documents (including who owns what components, deadlines, status, etc.), which are shared at a cadence the group agrees to.
 - Where possible, share broader priorities with cross-functional teams so they are aware of where their projects fit into the larger picture.
 - When summarizing meetings, highlight decisions made, deadlines set, and next steps.
 - High-level updates on projects and goals should be shared periodically with the full staff, recognizing that not every detail or decision needs to be shared with every member of the team.
 - If an action item is completed on behalf of, or in coordination with, someone else on staff, acknowledge that it is complete so that the other party knows a to-do item was executed.
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7. Availability, Out of Office & Communication Hours

- All PTO of one day or more should be listed on the shared calendar
- If response time (internal or external) will be affected by your travel or PTO time, out of office alerts should be used for phone and email when out of the office for one day or more. The internal message should include who on staff is your backup for key areas of responsibility, particularly for projects or initiatives that are timely.
- Availability notices on Teams should be managed or set to match your Outlook calendar
- We respect different working styles and schedules. While you may receive communications outside of business hours, you are not expected to respond unless it is urgent and clearly marked as such.
 - There are tools to schedule communications or “delay send”, which can be useful
 - Likewise, there are settings to turn on/off notifications at select times

- If you need something urgently and outside of normal hours, communicate directly via phone or text and be clear about the reason and timeframe. Use this sparingly.
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8. Open & Honest Communication

- We value and grow from open, honest, specific, constructive, actionable and kind communication/ feedback. We expect that from each other.
 - Give and receive feedback with those parameters in mind.
 - Our organizational values open and honest communication, while understanding we do not seek perfection.
 - Assume positive intent.
 - Feedback should be given and focus on behaviors, processes, or outcomes—not personal attributes.
 - Be direct but respectful, and avoid letting small issues build into larger ones.
- Express appreciation as often as you express constructive critique.
- When receiving feedback, listen fully before responding, and treat it as an opportunity to improve.
- We encourage staff to reach out directly to anyone on our team – regardless of position on the org chart - to discuss an issue or to share feedback. Supervisors are also prepared to manage situations if you are not comfortable doing so. Protocols are outlined in the employee handbook and accountability policy to support you with various feedback loops.

Why do we value direct communication so much?

- Transparency builds credibility, shatters hidden agendas, and clears up misconceptions.
- When other team members see that direct dialogue is the norm, it improves psychological safety, as they can feel more safe raising concerns. (for a bit more on this, see [this post](#))
- Addressing challenges reduces escalation of conflict.
- It increases clarity over guesswork, with fewer incorrect assumptions. The ability to have back and forth, asking questions and iterating, is valuable and leads to better results.
- Continuous feedback loops drive personal development and innovation.
- Avoiding direct communication with colleagues, and instead engaging in indirect exchanges with others, avoids addressing and correcting root issues. Engaging in side conversations is counterproductive, can often create more challenges if false assumptions aren't addressed, and is counter to our culture.

While we prioritize directly communicating with individuals, we have created an anonymous feedback vehicle for staff. This is not the forum for feedback regarding individuals, nor for addressing HR concerns. Should you have a question where you are unsure of where to send it, something that is a question for the entire senior team or a similar topic, you can send your question or feedback to:

<https://tellonym.me/sa.acce>

This is an anonymous platform where all messages sent will come directly to Sheree Anne's cell phone, in real time, via an app. Depending on the nature of the comment or question, either Sheree Anne will share a response directly with all staff, or she will discuss it with others as needed, and will respond after gathering input. Please include as much specificity as possible to bring clarity to what's being raised and help ensure responses are aligned with what's being sought.

By following this manifesto, we commit to:

- Respecting each other's time and attention.
- Prioritizing transparency over perfection.
- Creating a culture where communication strengthens—not strains—our collaboration.

ACCE Team Values

Our Success is Rooted in Our Team

We are an inclusive and welcoming team that respects everyone's input, with emphasis on achieving organization-wide goals. We foster an environment focused on trust and collaboration, where we support each other by listening and using open and honest communication.

We Strive for Excellence, Not Unattainable Perfection

We're solutions-focused and highly accountable to each other, as well as our members. This team delivers quality service without losing sight of the need for balance. Individual and team development are supported for both organizational success and personal career growth.

Innovation is Paramount for our Team and Industry

We identify opportunities for calculated risks, and those risks are supported enterprise-wide. We remain future-focused in our own activities and how we serve our industry. Innovation requires that we challenge each other and our members, and remain nimble to shifting external dynamics.