Wahnapitae First Nation Policy:
Mass Email Communications

Adopted by **Band Council Motion # 20/21-09-142**
At **Chief and Council meeting of September 28, 2020**

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1. Overview:

As part of its ongoing effort to communicate and engage more effectively with members – especially given ongoing challenges posed by COVID-19 -- Wahnapitae First Nation will make use of mass email systems. This will complement other communication efforts currently in use and in development by WFN.

2. Purpose:

The driving purpose of this system is to connect Wahnapitae First Nation more directly and more quickly to its membership both on and off reserve. This is necessary, given the need for member outreach in the face of the following restrictions around existing member communications processes:

- Physical mail is often less timely and more cost prohibitive in terms of sharing larger documents, particularly for off-reserve members,
- In-person community engagement sessions are currently restricted due to the advent of COVID-19,
- Website is infrequently visited, and currently in a transitional process, and
- Facebook / social media relies on a capricious algorithm to deliver messaging to users who may or may not check the specific outlet on a specific day, or who may not even use social media at all.

While various efforts are underway to improve how WFN works through the above-listed avenues, mass emailing is needed as an additional solution to ensure that members are potentially able to receive key information in a timely and cost-effective way.

Moreover, reputable mass email systems often also track metrics around technology use (i.e. mobile vs. desktop) that will, in turn, allow WFN to better understand how to communicate with members in a way that best serves them.

3. Audience:

The primary audience for WFN communications will be members both on and off reserve.

Only members who have successfully corroborated their identity as members will be able to receive communications deemed to be members-only, such as community engagement pieces or other efforts to seek member feedback on sensitive or legislative changes, or on specific projects.

However, non-members (community / industry partners, media, etc.) will be allowed to sign up to receive mass email communications that are specifically deemed to be public knowledge and not restricted to community members, such as community newsletters, events, programs, and all related updates – in other words, items that are already promoted through the website and social media outlets. Community projects approved for public discussion may be discussed broadly in this context, but specific feedback may only be requested through members-only communications.

Non-members (or individuals who have failed to verify their identity as members) will be restricted from receiving communications that are deemed to be members-only. Specific user lists will be maintained so as to ensure that messages are issued as appropriate.

4. System / Software:

Mass email efforts will be handled via third-party software systems that are established, secure, and meet the specific communications needs of WFN. This method will ensure a consistency and professionalism for the organization, safety and privacy for members, all while delivering appropriate metrics for staff to determine relevance, efficiency, and effectiveness.

With this in mind, the software/system should ideally meet most or all of the following criteria:

- Dedicated subscription/opt-in process, including editable online sign-up forms and landing pages
- Flexible user management, complete with list creation and subscription status tracking
- Strong capacity for metrics / behavioural tracking
- Email scheduling
- WYSIWYG modular approach, with general ease of use
- HTML code additions/editing within modular blocks
- Creation of dedicated, archivable links for campaign redistribution
- Image library hosting
- Template creation
- Built-in survey/polling functionality
- Preview screens, incl. mobile previews / test emails
- Social media integration

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- Proven customer support
- Competitive pricing

The software/system's adherence to the above, and its general effectiveness for achieving WFN goals, will be reviewed every six months. This date can and will be adjusted if the system is egregiously failing to meet WFN's communications needs.

Currently, the selected system is MailChimp, and will next be reviewed March 19, 2021.

5. Access:

To ensure visual and linguistic consistency, and to ensure a controlled flow / schedule so as to avoid overwhelming the membership, direct access to the mass email system will be limited solely to the Communications Coordinator (or their designate, if applicable), who will operate it at the behest of the Executive Director in consultation with respective WFN departments as necessary.

6. Criteria:

To avoid overuse of the system and prevent members/subscribers from being overwhelmed, specific controls must be put into place to ensure that WFN communications are as effective, efficient, and relevant as possible.

To this end, use of the mass email system must adhere to the following criteria:

- Communications must not be issued via this system more than two times per week.
  - Exceptions will be made in emergency situations, and on a case-by-case basis as determined by relevant staff.
  - Exceptions will also be made if recipients have previously and specifically consented to receiving more frequent communications on a particular topic, such as COVID. Even so, WFN must be diligent in ensuring that this is not overused even in this instance.
  - If a department expects to require multiple campaigns in a single week, the focus should be instead to compile those into a single departmentally themed campaign.
  - Over time, there may be room to expand this restriction from two times per week total to two times per week per interest group (i.e. Lands, Education, general notices, etc.); the appropriateness of this expansion will be gauged by the Executive Director in coordination with the Communications Coordinator three months following the initial launch.

- Generally speaking, communications must be for informational / engagement purposes, and very specifically NOT for commercial purposes. Commercial electronic messages fall within the Canadian Anti-Spam Legislation, and while governments are exempt, it is generally wise to avoid placing members in a position where they could view WFN communications as spam.
  - More specifically, communications should be of a specific type:
    - Community notices / developments,
    - Community engagement / feedback,

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- Newsletter distribution (either as a distribution of the monthly community newsletter, or of a separate, new e-newsletter that packages much of the same content in a more timely way on a more frequent basis), and
- Other types as deemed necessary or appropriate.

- Where possible, mass email requests should ideally be issued and approved a minimum of one week in advance so as to prevent overloading, allow for prioritization of time-sensitive messages, and provide staff sufficient time to construct and approve email creation.
  - Again, this can and will be adjusted as necessary on a case-by-case basis in sufficiently pressing or emergency situations.

7. Process:

The process for approval and delivery of communications issued through the mass email system is as follows:

1. A request for a mass email campaign is issued to the Executive Director, provided it conforms to the items outlined in the Criteria section, with an especially tight focus on advance timing restrictions.
2. Once approved by the Executive Director, the request is forwarded to the Communications Coordinator to be added to the mass email schedule in a way that respects existing obligations and general timeliness.
   a. Given the need to avoid over-scheduling and scheduling conflicts, requests will be prioritized based on the order in which they are received, though factors such as time sensitivity may cause later submissions to be moved higher in the queue.
3. The Communications Coordinator then works with the requesting individual to obtain the information needed to build the email campaign, using the relevant template (if established and/or necessary).
4. A test email is then sent to the Executive Director and requesting individual for approval.
5. The finalized campaign is then scheduled to be issued to the email contacts who have consented to receive them per the category appropriate to the material.

NOTE: The mass email schedule will initially be populated by an admin-wide email call for requests, whose responses will be triaged by the Executive Director in conjunction with the Communications Coordinator. Following this initial call, all requests will be handled per the above-outlined process.

8. Calendar Management:

Management of the mass email schedule will be the responsibility of the Communications Coordinator, in conjunction with the Executive Director.

In order to ensure a broad understanding of existing restrictions / openings in the calendar, and to allow departments to plan their requests accordingly, the Communications Coordinator will create and maintain the mass email schedule as a shared Outlook calendar, which will be set to be viewable but not edited by recipients. This will help to prevent internal timing conflicts and assist in future planning.

As indicated above, requests should be made with this schedule and the one-week-minimum advance notice criteria in mind.

9. Content / Format:

The content of WFN-issued email campaigns must be professional in tone, in keeping with other WFN-branded communications.

Email campaigns must always include the use of the WFN logo as an identifier as official communications.

All email campaign footers must include the option to unsubscribe or to modify user preferences.

Specific templates will be created for various types of email campaigns over time so as to ensure visual and branding consistency.

10. Obtaining Subscribers:

Individuals will be added to the mailing list userbase upon direct request, as well as by subscribing through various public-facing avenues such as a landing page hosted on the WFN website / social media / etc. Subscribers will undergo a double opt-in process, where those who have submitted their email address will then receive a confirmation email to verify their email and desire to subscribe.

Individuals who indicate they wish to receive communications designated for members only must officially confirm their identity as a Wahnapitae First Nation member prior to be added to the members-only contact list.

NOTE: Initially, all emails currently on file for members will be added to the mass email contact database, and will be issued an initial email campaign to allow for an explanation of the process, an opt-in opportunity (so as to effectively create a double opt-in process for this stage), and clear notices that unsubscribing is possible at any point going forward.

11. Bouncebacks / Opt-outs:

The Communications Coordinator will, on a monthly basis, review the Bounceback list to examine what may be preventing direct communication with individuals on said list. This will require consideration of accuracy of user-entered data, potential technical issues, or the general impact of email frequency on email open rates.

This document was last updated Sept. 19, 2020.

It should be reviewed again Dec. 18, 2020.