

To: Shonna Ferree, Rikki Wheatley-Boxx, Krista Gurko
From: Jess Harper, Elise Wilding, Kym Goodsell
Date: April 27, 2016
Subject: Recommendation Report

Introduction

For our project, we partnered with Public and School Partnership (PSP). By virtue of the mission of PSP, many of their Volunteers In Service To America (VISTA) members and all of the site supervisors are based off-site at partner organizations. These sites are based throughout Utah, although there is a larger concentration in northern Utah. Due to the infrequency of gatherings at the main office, email is the primary method of communication.

Specifically for this project, we examined group emails. Although many emails are sent to individuals, we were interested to see if group emails, which are obviously not tailored to specific individuals, are effective within PSP.

Methods

Initially, we reached out to Shonna Ferree and asked her to identify potential problems in PSP's communication. Once she identified a potential problem in the email communication, we collected sample emails from her to observe.

Next, we conducted interviews with the PSP office staff — Shonna Ferree, Rikki Wheatley-Boxx, Krista Gurko, and Ciara Marshall — to learn more about their emailing process and their thoughts about it.

We also sent out a survey to VISTAs, site managers, and other people who receive PSP group emails in order to learn how they feel about PSP's current email system and which ways they would like to see the system improve. This survey was distributed in a regular PSP email as well as on the PSP VISTA Facebook page in order to maximize the number of respondents.

Findings and Recommendations

Observation 1

From our observations and the survey results we collected, we determined that the emails from PSP to their various members and volunteers are being sent out too often.

In our interviews, we determined that emails are being sent out approximately 2-4 times a week. This depends on how much information there is to be distributed that week and what events are taking place. The office staff said that they were making a conscious effort to not send out too many emails.

However, 52.9% of our survey respondents (which consisted of current VISTAs and site supervisors who actually receive the emails) responded that they would like to only get one email a week from the PSP office. A few respondents specifically requested that the PSP office send one email a week on a predictable day, such as Monday or Friday.

41.2% of respondents replied that they would like to receive emails 2-3 times a week. This is on the lower end of the range that PSP currently uses. Only one respondent (5.9%) said they like receiving emails 3-4 times a week.

Overall, an overwhelming amount of respondents wanted to get even fewer emails from the PSP office, despite their recent efforts to reduce the amount of emails.

Recommendation 1

Based on these findings, we recommend that the PSP office reduce the number of emails that they send out per week. We recommend that one main email is sent out containing all of the relevant information for the week. In order to make this most efficient, we recommend that this email is sent out on the same day every week--preferably Mondays, if that fits in the schedule--so that VISTAs and other recipients know when to expect the email. This will help ensure that the email is actually being read, which is a concern that we uncovered in our interviews. Additionally, when necessary, it seems that most VISTAs and site supervisors would appreciate a second, shorter email later in the week if events have changed, there are important reminders, etc.

Observation 2

We understand that it can be difficult to efficiently gather all the information that needs to go into emails, especially when this task lies primarily with one individual. This means that if something is forgotten or skipped over, another email has to be sent out to include the missed information. This results in multiple emails being sent out over the course of a week, which of course goes against our previous recommendation.

Additionally, we realize that recommending that only one email be sent out a week could create a lot of stress in trying to compile all of the important information into a single email. As far as we could find, there is currently no comprehensive system in place to compile all of the important information in order to save time and effort.

Recommendation 2

In order to consolidate the various announcements and information needed in the emails, we recommend that the PSP office use a Google document to which everyone in a leadership position at PSP can add in and edit necessary or relevant information. This document can be updated throughout the week as important pieces of information come up. The information can be easily formatted into bullets, ordered by importance, and color coded. On the assigned day, the person sending the email can simply copy the information from the Google doc into the weekly email.

Everyone who has information that needs to be distributed should be added to the Google document and informed that if they fail to include that information, it will not be included in the group email. This will hopefully make sure that all parties use the document. If not everyone uses the document, it loses its effectiveness.

Overall, this new system will make the emails more organized and eliminate the need for more than one email to be sent out because the entire week's announcements will have already been compiled and agreed upon. It will also make the job of the person sending out the email easier and save time because all of the information can easily be formatted as it's added, instead of trying to remember and format at the time the email is being sent.

Observation 3

According to our survey results, 35.3% of VISTA and supervisor respondents feel like the emails sent out are too long. Additionally, several people commented that some emails sent out have too much information that the members do not necessarily need to know. Overall, the respondents want shorter, relevant emails. The PSP administration does seem to be aware of this issue and has been combating this issue two ways. First, they have been trying to send multiple smaller emails (see recommendation one). Secondly, they have also been striving to order emails appropriately with most important information coming first, using bullets to give the essential information only, and creating emphasis with colors and bolding. However, based upon the sample emails, this is occurring infrequently, and all three methods rarely occur in a single email.

Recommendation 3

We recommend that the PSP office make sure that ordering and bullets are used consistently to consolidate information and make it more skimmable. This will allow recipients to more quickly internalize relevant information. Remove introductory pleasantries that don't have to do with the relevant content of the email. These methods will be increasingly necessary as emails are being sent out less frequently.

Observation 4

In our survey, 100% of "other" respondents (not VISTAs or site supervisors) said that they would be interested in receiving (and 40% said they would be interested in receiving more) group emails from PSP. They were specifically interested in getting quarterly or monthly updates on important awards (40%) or community events (60%).

Recommendation 4

Although we intended this section to be filled out by stakeholders within leadership positions at the sites, we cannot be confident that they were the only respondents in this section because the survey was posted on the Facebook group and sent out by site supervisors. To ensure that emails are not being sent out unnecessarily, we would suggest that site supervisors contact stakeholders directly once again. If stakeholders are interested, we would recommend quarterly updates regarding important developments, such as big community events (e.g. Mayor's Day), big grant awards, and achievements throughout the organization.

Observation 5

Before we began researching, Shonna specifically asked us to discover if the sender email made a difference in readership. In our interviews with PSP's office staff, we discovered that emails are typically sent out to VISTAs and site supervisors from more than one email account. Based upon our other observations, we thought that the different emails from multiple accounts would potentially be confusing and inefficient. However, according to our survey results, 88.2% of the survey respondents do not care which account the emails are sent from and read the emails regardless.

Recommendation 5

Although the survey makes it seem like the sender email doesn't matter, we still recommend that the PSP office consistently send out their weekly emails from the same account. While it doesn't matter which email it is, using a consistent email is most professional and consistent. This shouldn't add to the workload since only one email is being sent out.

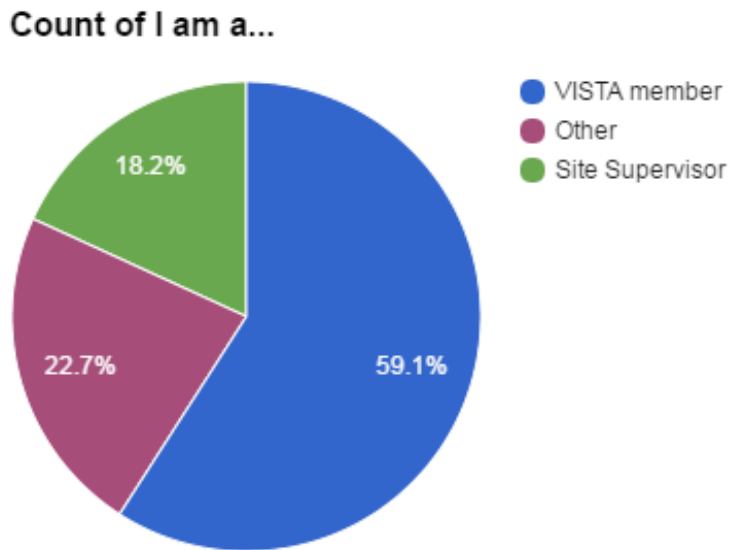
Conclusion

Overall, PSP is doing a good job with its email communication; there is already a high level of readership, and the leadership is striving to think critically through many of these issues already. Based on the survey results, the changes leadership has put in place to combat these issues have been well-received. However, there is always room for improvement, and we believe that by making these few recommended changes in the group email communication between members, the communication will be even better.

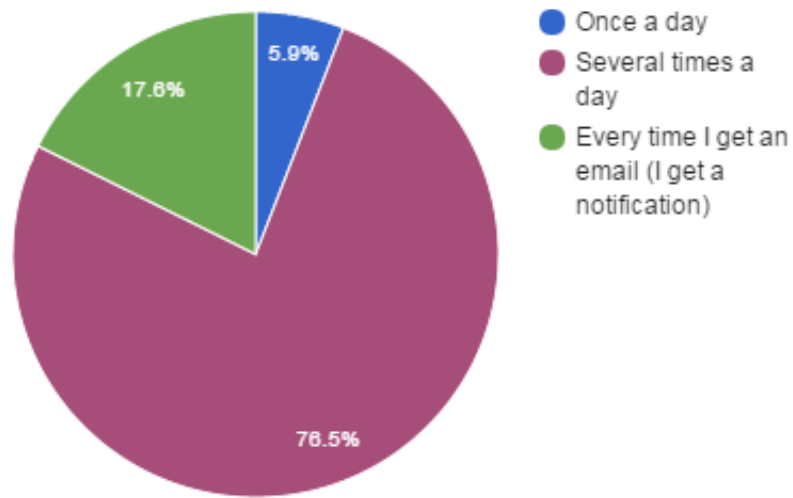
Appendix

Note: There were some responses in the survey that the PSP office may want to consider, although they were not repeated often enough to include in the body of our recommendations.

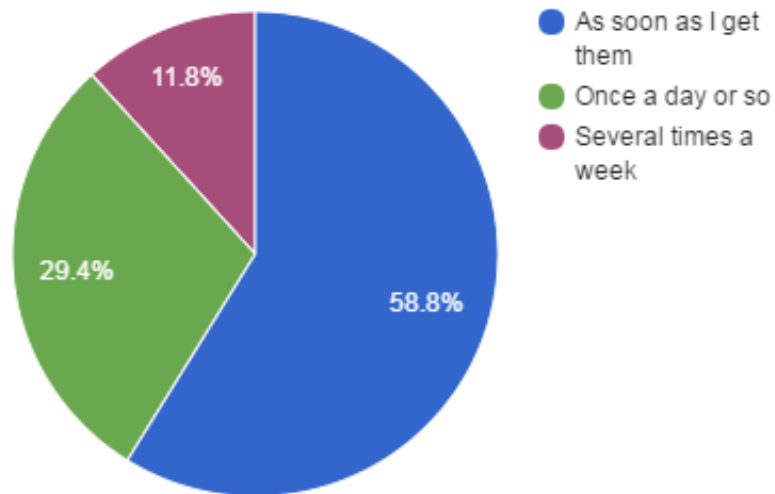
Appendix A: VISTA and Site Supervisor Responses



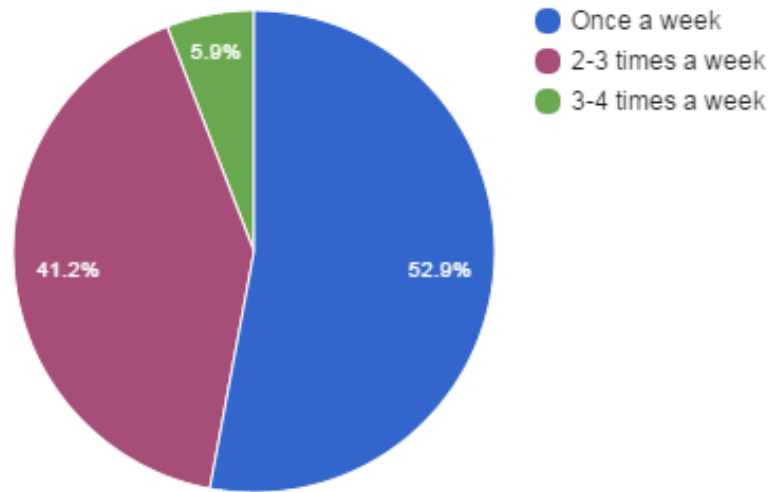
How often do you check your email?



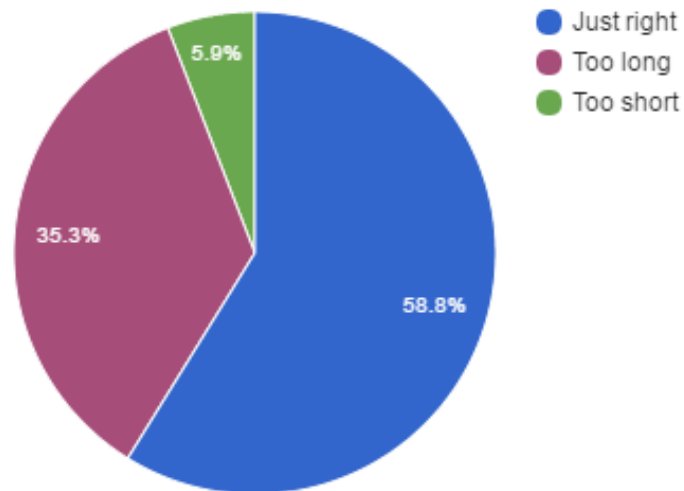
How often do you read emails from the PSP office?



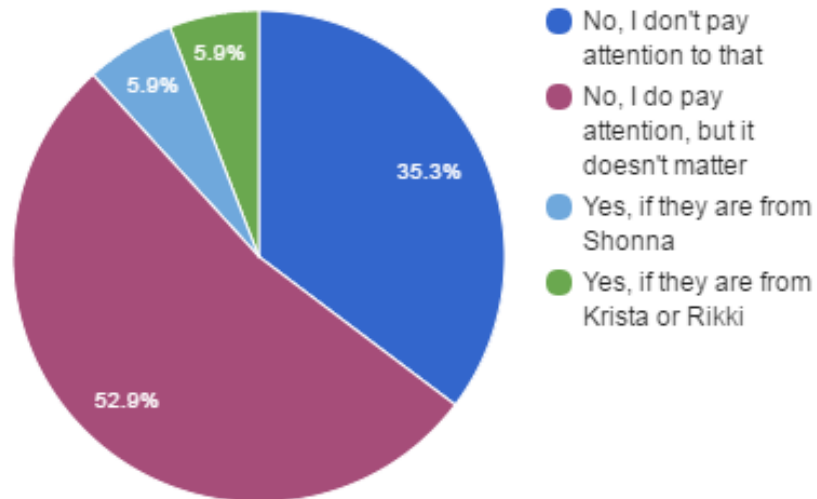
How often do you think PSP should send out group emails from all emails (office email, VISTA leader, office assistant, etc)?



Do you feel like emails are too short? Too long?



Are you more likely to read emails quickly if you see they have been sent by a certain person?



Are the emails easy to understand? Why or why not?

Yes. Straight forward

Definitely. They are usually pretty straightforward and to the point.

Too many words

yes Short and to the point

Yes.

Yes, described well

yes

Yes - however many of them are lengthy and do not apply directly to me.

The initial emails tend to be clear, but the followup ones can sometimes contradict the initial email with last minute details that would have been nice to have from the beginning rather than later.

I am very satisfied with how PSP sends emails. They are of a good length as well.

Yes, they are clearly outlined and important information is always in bold or a different color. Sometimes different pieces of info are in one email, but they always try to break the information up somehow so that it is easier to understand

They are easy to understand.

Yes and no. They are lengthy and give more information than may be necessary. It's nice to be in the know but maybe too much information.

Yes. Their emails are always clear. If the email came once a week, was concise, and had each topic readily identified, I would open it more quickly.

For the most part they are fairly easy to understand. Sometimes when there are big things coming up they can get a little wordy and confusing that way. But overall, I think they do a great job at trying to make things straightforward and easy to understand.

Are the emails well organized? Why or why not?

Yes.

Yes.

yes

yes

Usually. Shonna is really good about putting things into groupings, which is awesome.

Not Succinct Enough

yes They are short and to the point

Yes, good details

Yes - very organized

Yes. They are straightforward and organized in the order of when the information is prevalent.

Most times, yes. Bullet points are often used, which is good, especially when the email has several different pieces of information in it. Sometimes the information is divided into shorter paragraphs, which is still okay, but I prefer bullets

I like how most emails are short and sweet.

Yes

Yes, they have a purpose and get right to it. It is really nice.

What would you recommend changing about the current email communication within PSP?/

nothing

nothing

Having the mentor or Rikki or Shonna send a mass text stating if there is an important email that needs to be read right away would be helpful. I generally don't check my email passed 5pm

Sending less emails... maybe an email once a week on Fridays or Mondays so that we know what to expect for the week. Or limits sending multiple emails throughout the week, sometimes I feel like we get the same email three or four times.

Short and precise

Site supervisors don't always need the details that students need. Perhaps a short reminder or a quick FYI would be better.

I would just like the emails to be shorter, and if there are last minute changes to events/visits that the info be sent in a short text from the mentors.

No change needed

Less paragraph divisions in emails with a lot of different information (I prefer bullet points)

Most emails that are longer, I generally just skim through just to see if anything applies to me. Short and concise emails are most effective for me.

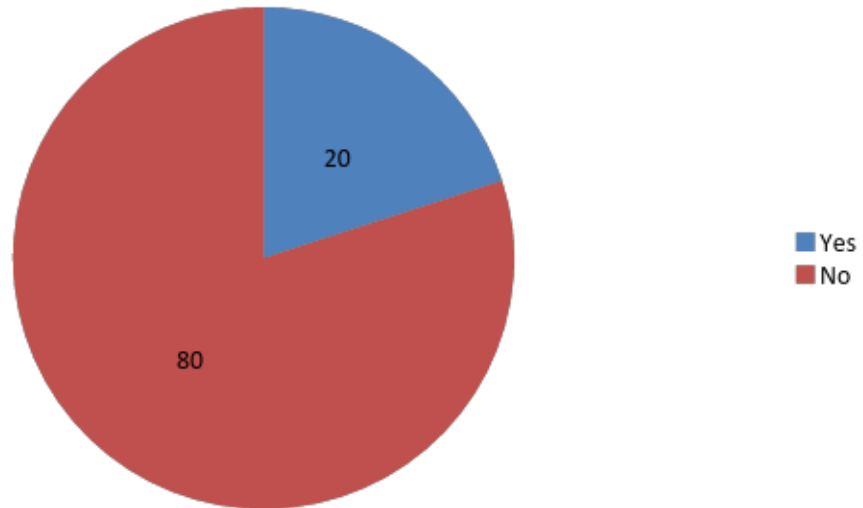
The design of the email would be helpful. Bullet the important pieces of info or highlight that which we need to focus on and address.

a weekly email on Mondays

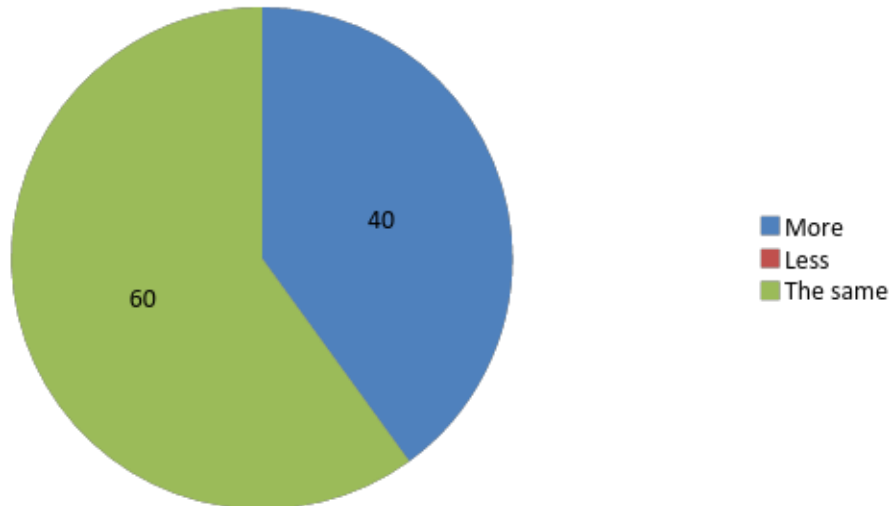
Nope. I think it is great the way it is.

Appendix B: "Other" Survey Responses

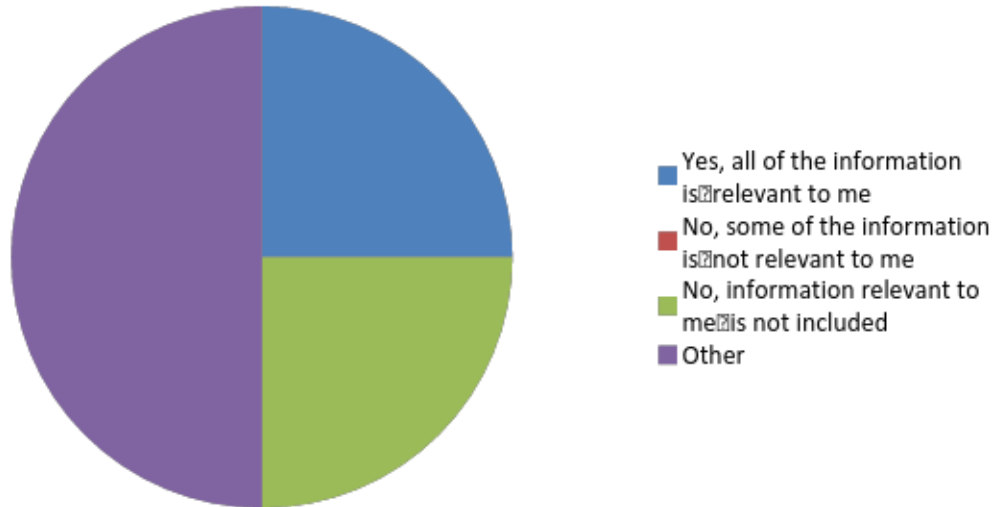
Do you currently receive group email communication from PSP?



Do you want to receive more, less, or the same number of group emails from PSP?



Is the information within emails relevant to your position within the organization?



Appendix C: Interview Questions

- 1 What is your job title? How would you describe your job?
- 2 What does your typical day at work look like?
- 3 What do you think is purpose, or purposes, of the emails? What kinds of information do they contain?
- 4 Do you think that purpose is coming across well in the emails? Why or why not?
- 5 Overall, what do you feel are the strengths and weaknesses in the current email system?
- 6 How frequently do you think the emails should be sent out? Why?
- 7 How do you measure the success of your emails overall? Do you feel the current emails are being read thoroughly?
- 8 Who currently sends these emails and how often do they do so?
- 9 Is sending the emails a responsibility you would willing take on? Enjoy taking on? If not, who would you like to see responsible for them?
- 10 What else do we need to know about email communication within PSP?
- 11 Do you have any questions for us about our process?