

Sustainability Practices for 2022

It's two years into this pandemic, and many of us are looking for ways to sustain our wholeness and our dedication as health care workers. As institutional leaders, you have heard many ideas on how to support the resiliency and well-being of your teams. Some of these ideas have resonated, while others have seemed impractical, irrelevant, or unattainable.

The Office of Professional Wellbeing (OPW) is recommending that you implement **three sustainability practices - concrete steps** - that if implemented widely, will support your work force. These recommendations are considered basic, core well-being interventions. They are generally simple to implement and do not cost anything. They are based on newly released guidelines by the National Academy of Medicine and by other national well-being thought leaders. I want to thank my colleagues at USC Keck School of Medicine for generously allowing me to use their content and format to publicize these ideas.*

Please refer to the following pages for details. If you or your team would like to consult with the wellness team for other ideas or for implementation, please contact OPW@salud.unm.edu or Elawrence@salud.unm.edu.

RECOMMENDATION 1: Healthy E-mail.

Consider how your team can reduce burnout and improve work-life boundaries by reducing overall volume of emails, making email hours of operation explicit, and role modeling through leadership.

RECOMMENDATION 2: Healthy Meetings.

Consider how your team can reduce burnout and improve morale by increasing the effectiveness of meetings, reducing the overall number of meetings, and preserving meeting-free times for big-picture thinking and flow state.

RECOMMENDATION 3: Healthy Teams.

Consider how your team can reduce burnout and build trust, camaraderie, and positive feelings by implementing consistent practices of appreciation and belonging - based on everyone's unique strengths rather than performance, per se.

**Thanks to Dr. Chantal Young and her colleagues at Keck SOM. Email taskforce: Carmen Carillo, MSHRM, SHRM-CP, Debra Cuellar, MSHRM, SHRM-CP, Kevin Tang, and Lindsey Reeves, OTD, OTR/L, CEAS. Meetings taskforce: Dara Weintraub, MSW, Joyce Perez, and Suzanne Huynh. Appreciation and Recognition taskforce: Jeffrey I. Gold, PhD, Suzanne Huynh, Cortney Montgomery, Lindsey Morrison, and Elizabeth O'Toole.*

WELL-BEING RECOMMENDATION 1: **Healthy E-mail.**

Information for Leaders

Background

Email communication is a major contributor to burnout. In just a couple of decades, email has become the primary form of professional communication and it has taken over our school and work lives. Poor email boundaries have worsened during the COVID-19 pandemic and remote work.

Each UNM SOM department and division has their own unique “email culture.” Email culture refers to unwritten expectations regarding how many emails are sent, expected response time for emails, and hours of operation during which people are expected to respond to emails. The culture often develops organically over time and without intentional decisions by the group.

When expectations are not made explicit, people often assume that they should mirror the email behavior of their leadership and/or be available via email during off-work hours. The “anticipatory stress” of feeling always ready to receive a work- or school-related email after hours, even if one never arrives, can lead to professional and personal distress. People who check emails at night, for example, report increased anxiety, decreased sleep quality, and lower relationship satisfaction. Use of blue light emitting devices at night has negative impacts on sleep routines and circadian rhythms.

When we can take a true break from work email, we can adequately care for ourselves and return to work rejuvenated and motivated.

Healthy Email Guidelines

*Here are some e-mail guidelines developed by OPW based on a literature review, KECK SOM materials, and discussions with leadership. Please feel free to use as is or adopt to your departmental needs. **Please be clear with your team that you endorse these recommendations and that these guidelines reflect your expectations.***

Expected turnaround response time for emails.

- During your regular work or school day, responses are expected within 24 hours and no sooner.
- If you need or expect a reply to your email the same day or urgently, you can make a phone call instead. At the very least, if a response is needed more quickly, make it clear in the subject line and body of your email.

Hours of operation for sending and responding to emails.

- Sending and responding to emails is only expected during your regular work or school day, which is between 8am and 5pm for most people.
- When initiating emails outside of regular hours, please consider drafting but not sending emails and/or the use of the delayed send function.
- Emails should not offer opportunities on “first come, first serve” basis, as that may encourage recipients to repeatedly check email.
- Consider the possibility of group-wide “email free” periods during the work or school day (e.g., every afternoon from 2-4 pm).
- Include language in your email clarifying your expectations.
 - My working hours may not be your working hours. Please do not feel obliged to reply outside of your normal work schedule.

Controlling volume of email.

- Sender can put “no need to reply” in subject heading or at beginning of email to eliminate need for acknowledgment replies – *Subject: New department email guidelines. No need to reply.*
- Do not send one-line emails such as “thank you,” “got it,” or “done.”
- Having to respond does not need to be the default assumption. If a response is needed, make clear to recipients what kind of response you need from them and the due date. – *Please reply with any questions or indicating that you have no further questions by Monday at 5 pm.*
- Eliminate use of “reply all” function unless critical to communication.

Organization, readability, and clarity of emails.

- In the email subject line, include a title that specifically shares nature of content and a due date. – *Subject: Draft of new Email Communication Guidelines policy – feedback requested by March 1.*
- Keep email to short paragraphs of 3-5 sentences. If it needs to be longer, use the attachment function.
- If you have multiple emails regarding a similar topic, add to same thread rather than separate emails.
- Emails are great for sharing information and often ineffective for conveying feelings such as sadness, disbelief, hope, indignation, exasperation, fatigue, etc. Save emotional conversations for when you can talk directly with someone.

Create good personal habits.

- Refrain from reading and writing emails after hours.
- Experiment with “email-free times” during working hours to improve your ability to make progress on bigger projects. You can set an away message during those periods with instructions on people can reach you with urgent matters



HOW TO BE A HEALTH SCIENCES

Email Guru



REDUCE QUANTITY

UNSUBSCRIBE

when you can



Create FOLDERS...

- ◆ from: Supervisor → IMPORTANT folder
- ◆ from: Subscriptions → Read Later folder
- ◆ auto-flag → Emails from VIPs
- ◆ auto-delete → When you can't unsubscribe

...and FLAGS

DON'T REPLY ALL



Nice, but not needed



PRIORITIZE

FOCUS

on recent messages



Begin at the top of your inbox so nothing urgent is missed

Determine your FOLLOW-UP process

Use a follow-up folder

- pro: Clear next steps
- con: Out of sight

Flag email

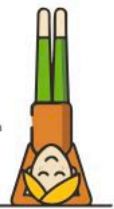
- pro: Easy to track down
- con: Clutters up inbox

Move to TASKS folder

- pro: Allows for organization
- con: Out of sight

Leave in your inbox

- pro: Easy to find
- con: Clutters up inbox



Check Email less frequently...



CLEAR COMMUNICATIONS

BE CLEAR

know your goal before you hit send

How you craft your message will help determine your recipient's response



DECIDE

inform or request?

Recipient Action:

- ◆ read → Communication → inform
- ◆ later → Communication → inform
- ◆ reply → Communication → request
- ◆ act → Communication → request

USE SEARCH



ARCHIVE INTO FOLDERS

HELP RECIPIENTS

FOCUS

your subject line



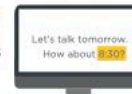
What TIME is it?



Different recipients may have different prime reading hours

MOVE

important threads to the top



&

FORMAT

messages

- ☰ Bullets → To list tasks and instructions
- ¶ Line Breaks → For shorter paragraphs
- T Bold → Names and deadlines
- ☰ Indent → To call attention to
- A Text Size → To differentiate
- 🔗 Hyperlink → For convenience
- Highlight → Names and instructions

Keep messages SHORT



email is not always the best way to

COMMUNICATE



Skipping the inbox

- ◆ Phone call → Complex conversations or quick answers
- ◆ Difficult message → Avoid miscommunication
- ◆ Zoom meetings → Touch base, clear conversations
- ◆ Private Conversation → Offline dialogue to ensure privacy

Content inspired by the Advisory Board Company, 2015



WELL-BEING RECOMMENDATION 2: **Healthy Meetings.**

Information for Leaders

Background

People in professional and academic environments are overwhelmed by the increase in the number of meetings in recent years. Feelings of zoom fatigue, time scarcity, decreased productivity, low morale, and overwhelm are leading to what some are calling “[The Great Resignation](#).”

Improving the effectiveness of meetings and reducing the overall number of meetings can have a substantial positive impact on the well-being of groups. For the unit, reducing meeting-related stress can help reduce employee burnout, improve job satisfaction, and increase retention. For the individual, more self-directed time allows for increased productivity and workflow, better focus, [deep work](#), and higher innovation, creativity, and flow state.

Healthy Meeting Guidelines

*Here are some meeting guidelines developed by OPW based on a literature review, Keck SOM materials, and discussions with leadership. Please feel free to use as is or adopt to your departmental needs. **Please be clear with your team that you endorse these recommendations and that these guidelines reflect your expectations.***

Assess if a meeting is necessary:

- Does a decision need to be made or is information being conveyed? If the latter, consider disseminating through e-mail, TEAMS, or another forum.
- Only invite individuals vital to decision-making,
- Can you reduce the frequency and/or the length of some meetings? Can you excuse some people from attending standing meetings? When we are not in a surge, think about reducing meetings to the frequency, length, and participation they were pre-pandemic.

Be respectful of everyone’s time:

- Start and end meetings on time.
- Shorten 60-minute meetings to 50 minutes and shorten 30-minute meetings to 25 minutes.
- Avoid scheduling meetings during the lunch hour.
- Avoid scheduling meetings at the start or end of work or school days/weeks to respect for those who may have child-care drop off or pick-up duties.
- With few exceptions, meetings should be held within working hours. Save after-hours meetings for urgent business when no other meeting times are possible, or a meeting is called on short notice.

Be respectful of your own time:

- If you have some control over your schedule, create a schedule that works best for you. Consider having “meeting blocks” during specific times or days of the week. Alternately, you can spread your meetings throughout the week, so that you don’t feel overwhelmed on any given day.
- Consider a “[meeting-free block](#)” of a day or half- day where you do not schedule any meetings, and instead dedicate that time to other work tasks.

Make the most use of everyone' time:

- Set an agenda for every meeting. Ideally, the agenda and pre-reading should be sent two-days in advance of the meeting or sooner and include specific goals to accomplish during the meeting for each agenda item.
- Stick to the agenda and focus on achieving your set goals.
- End each meeting with everyone repeating their action items and due dates to enhance clarity of expectations.
- If the conversation veers off into one that only involves certain team members, table that discussion for later and bring the conversation back to the topic that requires engagement at everyone in attendance.

Virtual or in-person:

- As we move back to more in-person meetings, allow for time to move from one meeting location to another when scheduling, and be explicit about whether the planned meeting is in-person or virtual.
- Consider polling meeting participants to get a sense of their preference for in-person vs. virtual.
- There are benefits to in-person meetings, including the spontaneous interactions that can occur between meeting participants. Reading non-verbal cues is easier in in-person meetings than on Zoom. People are more engaged with in-person meetings - on a virtual platform, it is too tempting to check e-mail or engage in other non-meeting activities. More complex topics are best addressed in-person, as are any topics likely to generate strong emotions.
- Virtual meetings will continue to have a place. They are a great way to bring people together from distant locations and reduce travel cost and time. They do not require a reserved meeting room. They may enable someone to juggle childcare or other home needs.

Use meeting time to build community and role model healthy practices:

- Start with appreciation, belonging, and shout-outs.
 - Incorporate check-ins or ice breakers at the beginning.
 - Acknowledge that everyone is busy, and you appreciate them attending this meeting.
 - Ask 2-3 people in the room to give a "shout out" to a fellow team member for a specific contribution or initiative (the more specific, the more meaningful the recognition)
- Be vulnerable
 - Self-disclosure about a challenge you have faced, or help-seeking can foster trust can encourage others to be more open and trusting
- Use meetings as a time to hear from everyone in the room - avoid having one person lecturing the whole session by sending out fact sheets/information in advance.
- Consider standing during short meetings or for part of the time during longer meetings. Invite other people to stand up and stretch as needed/wanted.
- When (and ONLY WHEN) pandemic rules have lifted, consider whether eating or drinking is OK during your meetings.
- Use functions like the chat box, polling, and raise hand so that quieter participants may contribute.
- Provide adapted programming or alternative activities for those with disabilities.

WELL-BEING RECOMMENDATION 3: **Healthy Teams.**

Information for Leaders

Background

Feeling appreciated for one's authentic and unique self at work and school is deeply linked to professional well-being. Human beings are highly social creatures, and it is a basic human need to feel like we belong to a group – that we are included, connected, seen, and valued. Areas of the brain such as the hypothalamus are affected when we feel appreciated, and appreciation leads to greater social and prosocial emotions and interactions with colleagues. Appreciation efforts have been shown to improve morale, comradery, and engagement, as well as having direct and substantial impacts on professional and academic performance.

When appreciation is not made explicit, people often assume that they are not valued – or that they are devalued. When team members are openly appreciated, it creates positive feelings, good memories, higher self-esteem, greater relaxation, and higher optimism about work and school – as well as a “pay it forward” and “we're in this together” mentality, which can spread exponentially through your group or team through positive feedback loops.

Healthy Meeting Guidelines

Here are some team guidelines developed by OPW based on a literature review, material developed at Keck SOM, and discussions with leadership. Please feel free to use as is or adopt to your departmental needs.

Please be clear with your team that you endorse these recommendations and that these guidelines reflect your expectations.

Recognize and appreciate

- Start with appreciation, belonging, and shout-outs.
 - Incorporate check-ins or ice breakers at the beginning.
 - Acknowledge that everyone is busy, and you appreciate them attending this meeting.
 - Ask 2-3 people in the room to give a “shout out” to a fellow team member for a specific contribution or initiative (the more specific, the more meaningful the recognition)
- Be vulnerable
 - Self-disclosure about a challenge you have faced, or help-seeking can foster trust can encourage others to be more open and trusting
- Honor what you value
 - Best team player
 - Least likely to be checking e-mail after hours
 - Most trusted by colleagues
 - Early adapter
 - Demonstrates random acts of kindness
 - Best teacher

- Use the personal touch:
 - Thank-you card mailed to a colleague's address or dropped off at their desk.
 - Providing real-time positive feedback and gratitude to a colleague when an interaction feels positive.
 - Contacting a colleague after the fact to mention that you noticed and appreciate something they did well.
 - Send an iCares or and iTeach award.
- Get to know your team:
 - Feature one team member in your newsletter each month, focusing on their non-work interests and lives outside of work.
 - Use rounding and annual reviews to make sure you know team members' priorities, goals, and engagement. Ask specifically about life-work integration.
 - When we can again meet safely in-person, get together for a meal, team retreat, or non-work activity.
 - Hold a division-wide, department-wide or program-wide book club (ask Dr. Rohan-Minjares about her new book club for residents), ideally during working hours.
 - Have each person on your team present their role and responsibilities to others on the team so everyone knows how she fits in to the team operations.