Managing a Mailman Mailing List

Mailman is a mailing-list server, which was designed to make group communication easier. A Mailman mailing list is established for a group and then members of the group can communicate with each other by sending electronic mail to the mailing list. Mailman automatically distributes the mail to each person who is “subscribed” (i.e. a member of the list).

This document explains how to request a mailing list and covers the basics of managing a list including adding and deleting users, what to do about mail from the list that is returned as undeliverable, emergency situations such as mail loops, and recommended reading for further information.
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How to Request a Mailing List

In order to obtain a Mailman list, you must meet certain criteria, which are outlined below. If you meet these qualifications, you can complete the on-line form located on the web:

http://problem.rice.edu/Forms/MailmanRequest.html

If you need help getting to this on-line form, stop by the Consulting Center (713.348.4983, 103 Mudd Lab) and the consultants can show you how.

Criteria

Classification of Lists

If you wish to create a mailing list for your organization, your group should fall into one of the following classifications:

• standing organizations, such as faculty committees, administrative working groups, or other university-wide organizations
• academic courses
• departments, i.e., lists of current graduate students, departmental faculty committees, or faculty concerned with particular topics
• research groups

Lists falling into the first category could be sponsored on an internal account. All other lists should be associated with a project number of the person to be considered responsible for the list (perhaps the primary owner/maintainer of the list).

Membership

• Lists should have at least 5 members to be eligible for creation.
• One list owner must be a member of the Rice community.
• Lists with non-local participants (outside the Rice community) should be directly related to ongoing research projects or discussion of topics important to the Rice community.
• Lists with subscribers outside the Rice community must fall within the guidelines presented by the governing parties of the various networks that serve as carriers for the traffic generated by the list.

List Names

List names must be suffixed with a –l. This distinguishes lists from other types of accounts. This convention prevents name collisions between organizational accounts and mailing lists.

Alternatives to a Mailman List

Mailman lists are best used to facilitate discussions. If you just want to submit a message to a lot of email addresses, you probably don’t need a Mailman mailing list. Rice’s bulk mail tool allows you to send email messages to more than 100 recipients (The RUF outgoing mail server will not accept a message with more than 100 recipients). If this is the kind of communication that you are interested in, send an email message to problem@rice.edu to have your email account approved for use with the bulk mail tool.
Types of Participants and Passwords

Participants
Lists have three types of participants: owners, moderators, and subscribers. List owners typically get administrative information about the list, such as subscription/unsubscription requests, moderation notifications, and error messages. List owners can change all settings on a list with the list owner’s password. Moderators of a list only get messages about subscriptions/unsubscriptions and moderation notifications. Subscribers can participate in the discussions of a list. Note: owner and moderator addresses don’t get the normal traffic on a list unless they are also added to the list as a subscriber.

Passwords
Once a list is created, it is created with an initial owner password. This password is only sent to the owner address that requested the account. That owner should distribute it to anyone who should have permission to change the way the list behaves, as it will grant anyone the ability to log into the administration web interface to change settings (no usernames are required). The initial list owner can and should generate a moderator password if moderators will be used for the list. Subscribers have a password for each list he/she is subscribed to. This password allows a subscriber to modify personal preferences (e.g. email address, digest preferences, etc.) for the list and to unsubscribe from the list.

Communicating with your List
Your list has several email addresses associated with it. In the following discussion, any reference to mylistname should be translated as the name of the list that you own, moderate, or are subscribed to.

My Email Address
When you give the Mailman system your email address, you should always use the email address that you specify as your return address/reply-to address in your email program. The best address to use for your return/reply-to address is username@rice.edu. If your mail program won’t allow customized return addresses, then specify whatever it presents (e.g. username@mail.rice.edu) when you subscribe to a list.

mylistname@rice.edu or mylistname@mailman.rice.edu
This is the main discussion address. If you are a subscriber and are allowed to post to the list, you will want to send your email here. All email sent to this address will be distributed to all subscribers of the list. Owners and moderators do not get email sent to this address unless they are also subscribed to the list.

mylistname-owner@rice.edu or mylistname-owner@mailman.rice.edu
This is the address used to communicate with the owner/administrator of a list. Typically, subscribers or other entities will send mail to this address to discuss concerns about the list behavior or other management aspects.

mylistname-request@rice.edu or mylistname-request@mailman.rice.edu
This address is used to send email commands to the list. For the most part, you should not need this interface unless you want to avoid the web interface to Mailman.

mylistname-bounce@rice.edu or mylistname-bounce@mailman.rice.edu
Do not send email to this address. The Mailman server uses this address to record failed delivery attempts to an address. It is also the address that notifies owners when an email address has been removed from the list due to repeated delivery failures and when a post from a non-member is held.
Managing a List

The following section explains how to access the administrative interface on the list server, add/remove users, reset passwords, transfer ownership of a list, and handle problems with mail loops and bounces.

The Mailman List Administration Interface

As soon as your list has been created, you will want to start setting options on your list and adding people to the list. All administrative tasks are performed through a web interface. The administrative interface can be found at the following address:

http://mailman.rice.edu/mailman/admin/mylistname

Where mylistname is the name of your list.

That page will prompt you for the list owner’s password. Once you log in, you will be presented with the General Options page. The top of the web page contains a collection of menus for all configurable options for a Mailman list. That menu list looks like this:

Mylistname Mailing List Administration
General Options Section

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Configuration Categories</th>
<th>Other Administrative Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>General Options</strong></td>
<td><strong>Tend to pending moderator requests</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passwords</td>
<td><strong>Go to the general list information page</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language options</td>
<td><strong>Edit the public HTML pages</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Membership Management</td>
<td><strong>Go to list archives</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-digest options</td>
<td><strong>Delete this mailing list</strong> (requires confirmation)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digest options</td>
<td><strong>Logout</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Make your changes in the following section, then submit them using the Submit Your Changes button below.

The currently active menu is presented in bold and within brackets [ ]. When you first log in, you are taken to the General Options menu. The section just below the menus will be a description of the current menu subject. Here is a summary of what subjects are covered under each menu:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General Options</th>
<th>Fundamental list characteristics, including descriptive info and basic behaviors.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Passwords</td>
<td>Allows you to change the list owner and moderator passwords.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language options</td>
<td>Natural language (internationalization) options.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Membership Management (Membership List)</td>
<td>Search for or modify subscriber options.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Membership Management (Mass Subscription)</td>
<td>Subscribe people to your list.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Membership Management (Mass Removal)</td>
<td>Remove subscribers from your list.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-digest options</td>
<td>Policies concerning immediately delivered list traffic.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Managing a Mailman Mailing List
Digest options

Privacy Options (Subscription Rules)
This section allows you to configure subscription and membership exposure policy. You can also control whether this list is public or not. See also the Archival Options section for separate archive-related privacy settings.

Privacy Options (Sender Filters)
Control posting by subscribers and non-members. You can ban or allow specific addresses or domains in this section.

Privacy Options (Recipient Filters)
This section allows you to configure various filters based on the recipient of the message.

Privacy Options (Spam Filters)
This section allows you to configure various anti-spam posting filters, which can help reduce the amount of spam your list members end up receiving.

Bounce Processing
Control how your list handles broken email addresses.

Archiving Options
Turn on/off archiving and control privacy and behavior options.

Mail <-> News gateways
Allow postings on your list to show up on a Usenet newsgroup and vice versa.

Auto-responder
Modify whether your list should automatically respond to certain kinds of emails and set custom responses if preferred.

Content filtering
Policies concerning the content of list traffic. You can set whether your list accepts attachments and what type of attachments here.

Topics
Allows you to set whether you want posts characterized by topics.

Tend to Pending Moderator Requests
Accept/reject subscription and message requests.

Go to the general list information page
http://mailman.rice.edu/mailman/listinfo/mylistname

Edit the public HTML pages
Edit
http://mailman.rice.edu/mailman/listinfo/mylistname

Go to list archives
Go to your list’s archive page.

Delete this mailing list
Requires the list owner’s password.

Logout
Leave the system.

All options under each menu have descriptions of the behavior that you are modifying in blue links. If you need further information about an option, please click on that link.

Make sure you click on Submit Your Changes whenever you make a change. Otherwise, your list will not save the changes you have specified.

Adding Subscribers
Adding subscribers is a fairly straightforward operation. Once you have logged into the administrative web page, click on Membership Management and Mass Subscription. The first three options control whom to notify about this operation. The next text area is entitled “Enter one address per line below...”. Enter the email addresses and names in the following format:

Email (Last, First) or Email (First Last)

Example:
johnsmith@rice.edu (Smith, John)
janesmith@rice.edu (Jane Smith)
billysmith@rice.edu (Billy Smith)

Make sure you click on **Submit Your Changes**, or your changes will not be saved!

### Removing Subscribers
If you would like to remove a subscriber, log into the administrative web interface and click on **Membership Management** and **Mass Removal**. The first two options specify who should be notified about this operation. In the text area entitled “Enter one address per line below...”, enter all of the email addresses that you would like to remove from your list. Make sure you click on **Submit Your Changes**, or your changes will not be saved!

### Setting and Resetting Passwords
If you believe the list owner’s password has been compromised or just want to change the password, you can set that password by logging in to the administrative web page and clicking on **Passwords**. You can also set/reset the moderator password for your list here. Remember to click on **Submit Your Changes**! If all owners have forgotten the owner password, send an email to problem@rice.edu.

### Transferring Ownership of a List
If you are leaving Rice and would like to transfer the ownership over to someone else, you need to give that person the list owner’s password and add him/her to the list of owners under the **General Options** menu.

### Emergency Procedures
In some instances, a list can experience a mail war or internal loop. This commonly happens if your list is subscribed to another list. If an excessive amount of mail is passing between your list and another address, you can put your list into an emergency hold status so that it stops sending or receiving mail and requires moderation for all posts. To do this:
1. Go to the administrative web page at http://mailman.rice.edu/mailman/admin/mylistname
2. Scroll down to **Additional Settings** (under **General Options**)
3. Select **Yes** next to “Emergency moderation of all list traffic”.
4. Click on **Submit Your Changes**

### List Web Pages

#### A List of Lists
A web page with a collection of all public lists on the Mailman list server can be found at:  
http://mailman.rice.edu/mailman/listinfo

If you do not want to advertise your list on this web page, you should:
1. Go to the administrative web page at http://mailman.rice.edu/mailman/admin/mylistname
2. Log in with the list owner’s password
3. Click on **Privacy Options**
4. Select **No** next to “Advertise this list when people ask what lists are on this machine?”
5. Click on **Submit Your Changes**

#### List Specific Pages
Each list has a general information page specifically dedicated to it. That page can be found at:  
http://mailman.rice.edu/mailman/listinfo/mylistname
The purpose of this page is to provide general information for your subscribers and those interested in subscribing to your list. If you do not want to manually add addresses to your list, you should point users to this web page.

Archives

A copy of all messages posted to your list can be stored in an archive on the server. By default, list archiving is turned off for all newly created lists. If you would like the server to keep an archive of your list:

1. Go to the administrative web page at http://mailman.rice.edu/mailman/admin/mylistname
2. Log in with the list owner’s password
3. Click on Archiving Options
4. Select Yes next to “Archive messages?”
5. Click on Submit Your Changes

Archive Storage Policies

List archives are only kept on the server for a maximum of two years. Archives older than two years are removed from the server during the server’s routine maintenance time.

Archives and Privacy

Web search engines will index all pages that do not restrict the archives to subscribers. If the content of your list is privacy or security sensitive, you should consider not enabling archiving. If you need archiving and have security or privacy concerns, you can make your archive only available to subscribers of your list by:

1. Go to the administrative web page at http://mailman.rice.edu/mailman/admin/mylistname
2. Log in with the list owner’s password
3. Click on Archiving Options
4. Select private next to “Is archive file source for public or private archival?”
5. Click on Submit Your Changes

Getting Help

If you would like more information about Mailman, more documentation is available at:
http://mailman.rice.edu

A collection of Rice-maintained frequently asked questions is located at:
https://www.owlnet.rice.edu/cgi-rice/fom?file=395

If documentation cannot resolve your questions, visit http://problem.rice.edu or send an email with a help request to problem@rice.edu.