How to Obtain a Township E-mail

Over the years, electronic communication, such as e-mail, has become increasingly important. Electronic communication allows towns and other government entities to communicate efficiently, effectively, and inexpensively. It allows simple widespread dissemination of documents, enables people to respond in a time that works best for that individual, and simplifies the ability to contact many people, making communication more efficient and consistent. State agencies are beginning to offer services only by e-mail, with no paper submissions allowed.

At this point, townships must have at least one e-mail address available for township business purposes. We will look at several methods in which a township can obtain an e-mail, look through the “pros” and “cons,” and each of the methods of obtaining a town e-mail address. This document will also look at step-by-step processes on establishing an e-mail through each of the methods described below.

I. Key Terms

Before we begin discussing the types of ways a town can obtain an e-mail address, we have to define a few terms first:

**E-mail Address:** An e-mail address is an electronic mailbox. E-mail addresses are composed of **two parts**: a “username” and a “domain.” The e-mail address is also known as an e-mail account.

**Username:** The username is the part of the e-mail before the “@,” this identifies a particular user within a domain. Usernames must only be unique within a specific domain. For instance, there can only be one info@mntownships.org, but “info” can be used with other domains as well, such as info@gmail.com, info@yahoo.com, and info@hotmail.com.

**Domain:** A domain is “the part of a network address that identifies it as belonging to a particular website or domain.” The domain is the part of the e-mail address after the “@,” common domains include @gmail.com; @yahoo.com; and @hotmail.com. Each website has its domain name.

Let’s examine an e-mail address and how it compares to a street address. One can think of a username like one’s street address, and the domain name as the town, city, county, or state. Only
one street address can exist in a town; for instance, there can only be 100 Main St. in the Town of Blackacre. However, the same username can exist in a different domain, in the same way, 100 Main St. can also exist in the Town of Whiteacre. So, Info@mntownships.org and Info@gmail.com can coexist, but there cannot be two info@mntownships.orgs.

**II. THREE TYPES OF E-MAILS**

A town can use one of three methods to obtain an e-mail address: (1) utilize an already pre-existing domain; (2) create a town specific domain; or (3) create a town specific domain with a “.gov” ending. We will go over the “pros” and “cons” of each of these methods to obtain an e-mail address.

A. **Pre-Existing Domain:**

A town that utilizes already existing domain relies on another company or entity to provide the domain and e-mail address. That domain is unrelated to the township, even if the township has a website. For example, a town can acquire an e-mail address through domains like Google (Gmail), Yahoo, or Hotmail. This is a very common way for individuals to get an e-mail address.

1. **Pros:** First and foremost, utilizing a pre-existing domain will likely be the simplest form of obtaining a township e-mail. The only procedure the town needs to follow is getting onto a website and completing its instructions to create an e-mail. Second, there is the security and assurance that a large and pre-existing corporation will ensure the e-mail works and is reasonably secure from third-parties. The success of their business often relies on the service they provide. Third, the common domain name may be easier to remember when relaying that information to residents or others who request the address.

2. **Cons:** First, there is very little privacy from the company providing the e-mail service. For example, Google has access to all the information transmitted through “Gmail.” Second, although the corporations will be more secure when being attacked, they will also be subject, and consistently subject, to attacks from outside organizations to take the information. Third, the person creating the e-mail likely ‘owns’ it and its contents. This poses problems when transferring the e-mail address, especially if the former manager of the account left on bad terms or forgot the account information necessary to transfer the website to the next account manager. Fourth, the ability to find a unique username may
prove to be difficult since, as described earlier, other organizations with similar names may be trying to utilize the same username.

B. Creating a Domain

Creating a domain provides the township with it with a town-specific domain name. The town would have to spend a small amount of money to be able to do so. However, this will give the town the opportunity to expand their electronic presence, both by creating a town-specific address, and the opportunity to develop a website.

1. **Pros:** First, the town can create personalized accounts. For instance, the town of Blackacre could have an e-mail address like clerk@BlackacreTown.com, and similar addresses for the treasurer, supervisors, and employees. Second, if the town is considering creating a website for the township, creating a domain would allow for a town to create a website at its leisure. Third, the account provides privacy from third-parties, as only those with access to the domain can access the information in the e-mails.

2. **Cons:** First, this method is a little more complicated than creating an e-mail with a pre-existing domain name. The town would have to take the steps of creating/purchasing a domain; then, the town would create the e-mail. Towns may want to inquire about this process before choosing one of the other options because it is not terribly difficult but does have a few extra steps. Second, this may be more expensive than other services; domains will cost the town a nominal fee, “GoDaddy.com,” for instance, may cost around $20 a year. Third, security may be a concern. Generally, the same security measures will not be in place, as with a third-party provider. However, there will be less publicity of the town specific domain, so it is unlikely that the lesser security will be an issue.

C. Obtaining a “.gov” Domain

The town may also create a governmental domain, or a “.gov” domain, allowing the town to indicate that it is a government agency. So, the town can create a unique domain, identify the town, and allow for a town website, but also indicate that the town is a government entity.

1. **Pros:** First, this provides legitimacy based on the address. The “.gov” ending will indicate the town is a government entity, so when making communication with people unfamiliar with the town, the “.gov” suffix will give some initial understanding. Second, many of the same benefits of creating a domain also apply by creating a “.gov” domain.

2. **Cons:** First, there may be a longer delay in granting the domain, as there is an application process. Second, the cost may be substantially higher than creating one’s domain. The cost of a “.gov” e-mail is at least $400 a year.
E-mail Address from a Pre-existing Domain

Townships have several options if they are looking to create a township e-mail by using a third-party, pre-existing domain. This process will mainly look at Google’s process (Gmail) and note when other common providers may differ.

Step 1:

The first step is to get to one of these websites. The most common of which will be Google; however, one can also utilize Yahoo, Hotmail, or any other domain that allows the town to obtain an e-mail. It is best to choose a well-known e-mail provider like those listed here or similar. Do not use the e-mail address offered by the internet service provider as your business or township e-mail address. You should assume that the address provided by the internet service provider is available only as long as you subscribe to their internet service, and that you will lose access by changing providers.

Below, you can see the start screens for both Google (Gmail) and Yahoo.

When you get onto one of the websites, including mail.google.com, mail.yahoo.com, Hotmail.com, or outlook.com, hit the “create an account” tab.

Above uses the examples of the Google’s and Yahoo’s sign-in screen.

Also note, like with Google, you can create an account for business, rather than personal purposes. If given that ability, it would be best to take advantage of the business account.
Step 2:

In just about every domain provider, you will be asked to give some information; what is required will differ by provider.

When creating your account, it is likely that you will have to use a personal name. Here we can see it is a requirement for both Google and Yahoo. However, the email address should be town specific. Here we are using the example of Blackacre Township, so the email address is BlackacreTownMn@yahoo.com.

There is other information that can be considered optional between different providers. Here for instance, we can see that Google does not require a phone number or a “recovery email,” whereas Yahoo does require a phone number, at a minimum.

There is other identifiable information that may or may not be required. Google for example requires the user to choose one of their gender choices, where Yahoo does not require a choice. Almost all providers will require a birthday, however.

Some providers will require some form of verification, which can come in the form of using a “back-up email,” text, or phone call. Here Yahoo requires a verification through a phone number, either by call or text.

Yahoo, and other providers will give a number that you have to input on the next screen, Yahoo gives a 6 digit number.
The application process is finished, you can start using your account!

From here you will be able to “compose” emails, which is the language used by both Google and Yahoo.

The initial screen is your “inbox,” which is where you will receive any emails. You can help organize the inbox by placing individual emails into separate folders—for example, the town could organize emails into two boxes, a “zoning” box and a “minutes request” box.
Additional Note:

Google is very upfront in providing a privacy notice; however, it would be best to take notice of it, no matter the provider, as the provider will likely use very similar privacy terms.

Here, we can see what data Google uses. Although Google is up front of how it uses your data, other websites may also utilize data stored by the website in similar ways to how Google uses the data.

Here, we can see that Google allows one to partially “opt-out” of their data tracking. However, there is only a limited amount of data that you can limit. So, when choosing how you are to go about obtaining a town email, please take this issue into account.
Creating Your Own Domain, and Creating an E-mail

If a township is looking to acquire a domain name it must work through a provider that will provide a domain name, two of which are Squarespace and GoDaddy.com. The focus of this section will be on Squarespace as it allows for both an e-mail to be acquired through Google Workspace, as well as to utilize the service’s tools to build a webpage. Google Workspace is a set of tools designed for businesses to operate online. The types of costs and issues that the town must consider will be looked at through the discussions of these services.

Step 1:

You must first find a website that distributes domain names. Here, we will use the example of Squarespace as it also allows for simplified website creation. However, Other sites like GoDaddy.com exist as well.

The front page of Squarespace if fairly straightforward. If you have already made an account, you would simply log-in; if not, you should “get started.”

After you hit “get started,” you will be brought into this page to pick a starting format for your page. You will be able to heavily format these if you are planning to create a website. If the town is not seeking to create a website, the town may simply use the domain for email addresses, and the choice of format may not concern the town.
Creating an account is fairly simple, if you already have a Google account (Gmail), and you would like to link that account to the town domain, you may do that here. If you either (1) do not have a Google account, or (2) do not want that account linked with the township, the town may follow with the “continue with email” option.

If the town is creating an account, the necessary material to create an account is limited to name, email, and password.
Step 2:

After creating an account and getting started, you can start creating your website, or start looking to obtain a domain for the township. After getting a domain, the town can create e-mails with the unique domain.

After registering, you will want to click settings along the sidebar. This will allow the town to learn more about obtaining a domain, learning about obtaining a domain-specific email, as well as other billing issues.

If the town does not already have a domain, it would be able to obtain a domain through the “get a domain” link.

If the town already has a domain, from “GoDaddy.com” for instance, then you can build a website from the “use a domain I own.”

Squarespace has a built in domain, but it is fairly cumbersome, limiting its use.
You can obtain a domain from several places, here we can see Squarespace’s domain finder on top and GoDaddy’s on the bottom. First, as we can see, you can purchase a different ending, like “.com,” “.org,” or more specific ones like “.town” and “.city.” Second, as we can see with GoDaddy, the domain plan may differ. It would be best to research and clarify that the domain the town purchased will allow the township to create an email.
OBTAINING A “.GOV” E-MAIL

If a township is looking to obtain a “.gov” e-mail, it must follow a procedure prescribed by dotgov.gov. First, the town must learn if they qualify to get the .gov domain, then the town must apply for the domain, and finally the town must complete dot-gov’s online form.

I. QUALIFICATION FOR A .GOV E-MAIL

There are several requirements to have a .gov e-mail; most will likely be simple to satisfy, but the town must be aware of the requirements before doing so. There are four general requirements, (1) eligibility, (2) no non-government advertisements, (3) no political or campaign information, and (4) adheres to naming conventions. For eligibility, the town must be a government entity, which they are. Second, the town should be able to limit or prohibit advertisements on the website. The town should not have advertisements on another domain either. Third, the town has to limit the political or campaign information, which is another standard limitation the board must make with government operations. As for naming conventions, the town must follow 41CFR 102-173.55, which says:

(a) To register any second-level domain within dot-gov, City (town) governments must register the domain name with the city (town) name or abbreviation, and clear reference to the State in which the city (town) is located. However -

(1) Use of the State postal code should not be embedded within a single word in a way that obscures the postal code; and

(2) Inclusion of the word city or town within the domain name is optional and may be used at the discretion of the local government.

This means a town’s .gov domain must be the name of the town (Blackacre) and the state (MN). Towns may and probably should include “town” in the domain name to prevent confusion between them and a city. Since there are some township names used several times in Minnesota, a town may find its name is already taken by another Minnesota township. In the end, a township domain name would look like this: BlackacreTownMN.gov or TownofBlackacreMn.gov.

II. APPLICATION LETTER

To receive a .gov e-mail, the town must send a letter to dot-gov domain registration. This letter must include: (1) A domain name request; (2) a statement the town will use the domain per the rules previously set out, (3) payment of the $400 per year price, (4) the name and addresses of points of contact. On the following page, you can find a sample letter that, after completed, may be e-mailed to registrar@dotgov.gov.
[City Government Letterhead]

[Date]

.Gov Domain Registration
c/o Verisign, Inc.
12061 Bluemont Way
Reston, Virginia 20190

Dear Domain Manager,

As [Supervisor] for the Town of [Town Name, State Name], I formally request that authority over the [xxxxx.gov] second-level domain name be delegated to the Town of [Town Name, State Name]. I attest that I am the highest-ranking elected official for [Town Name, State Name] or have signing rights on behalf of the Town of [Town Name, State Name].

This domain name will be used for [state the purpose]. The use of this domain is consistent with the Town of [Town Name] Internet policy. In addition, I will ensure the content of the requested domain name conforms to the .gov policy.

By requesting this domain name, I acknowledge that I will be responsible for payment of the annual $400 domain fee. I understand that if I wish to retire my domain, I must submit a written request to registrar@dotgov.gov. If a written request is not submitted, I understand that I will continue to be responsible for all accrued domain fees.

The following individuals will be listed as points of contact for [xxxxx.gov]. It is understood that the contact information must remain valid and up to date, and that administrative, billing, and technical points of contact will be unique.

Administrative Point of Contact
First Name, Last Name
Title
Address
Phone Number
E-mail Address

Billing Point of Contact
First Name, Last Name
Title
Address
Phone Number
E-mail Address

Technical Point of Contact
First Name, Last Name
Title
Address
Phone Number
E-mail Address

Security Point of Contact [recommended, see
https://home.dotgov.gov/management/security-best-practices/#add-a-security-contact] E-
mail Address

Sincerely,
[Signature]

[Name]
[Title]

[Notary Public Section]

Signed and sworn to (or affirmed) before me on [Date] _____________

Name of the Individual Making a Statement [First Name, Last Name] ______

Signature of Notary Public _____________

My Commission Expires [Date] _____________

Notary Public Seal
III. ONLINE REGISTRATION

Once dot-gov receives the authorization letter, it will verify your request and create .gov registrar accounts for each point of contact. After each point of contact has logged in to establish their account, any of them can complete the online domain request form. This form asks for some information you've already collected with the authorization letter and allows you to submit name server information for your .gov domain.

IV. FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Dot-gov has put together an FAQ regarding questions they receive.

A. Fees FAQ

Q: What are the costs of a .gov domain?
A: .gov domain name is $400 per year.

Q: What payment methods are accepted?
A: .gov can only accept credit card payments.

Q: How often do I need to renew my domain name?
A: Annually. As a point of contact, you'll receive several reminder e-mails. Please note that if your domain names are not kept current, they will be removed from active status. If any of your .gov domain names are removed from active status, services attached to them may experience issues.

Q: What happens if I do not renew my domain name?
A: See the response in the renewals and deletions FAQ.

B. Domain authorization FAQ

Q: What are the requirements for a domain’s points of contact?
A: There are several points of contact, including:

1. **Administrative contact**: someone from the signatory’s office that will approve the content. This person must be a government employee.

2. **Billing contact**: a person with access to a government credit card and the ability to pay registration fees.

3. **Technical contact**: a developer or administrator, often responsible for managing DNS and securing the infrastructure.
4. **Security contact**: a security contact is a recommended practice, and can be added to allow outsiders to report observed or suspected security issues at your domain. *Security contact details are made public.*

There cannot be a single point of contact duplicated across more than one role. An exception is made should you choose to use a personal e-mail address for a security contact. We recommend using an alias, like `security@<domain>`.

Each contact will have the ability to access the .gov registrar, make changes to DNS, or make payments.

**Q**: How do I request an exception to the naming conventions?

**A**: Exceptions to the naming conventions can be requested in the authorization letter. For cities and counties, we have outlined some circumstances where we may grant an exception.

**Q**: My authorizing authority won’t sign an authorization letter. What do I do now?

**A**: Without a letter signed by the party defined in our domain requirements as the authorizing authority for your organization, you cannot register a .gov domain name.

**Q**: My request was denied. What is the appeal process?

**A**: In October 1997, the Federal Networking Council delegated full responsibility for .gov domain registration to the General Services Administration. Please contact us with any questions you may have at 1(877) 734-4688.

**C. Domain Name System FAQ**

**Q**: What are the valid characters for a domain name and how long can it be?

**A**: A domain name may be up to 26 characters long, including the 4 characters used to identify the top-level domain (e.g., .gov). The only valid characters for a domain name are letters, numbers and a hyphen. Other characters, including a space, are not permitted. Domain names may not begin or end with a hyphen.

**Q**: Why won’t my domain work after updating the registration with actual name servers?

**A**: Adding name servers to a reserved domain does not change its status from reserved to active if other requirements are pending. You are permitted to reserve a domain for up to 90 days, giving you time to submit all of the required registration information.

If the name server information is the only remaining information required for registration, it will take approximately 1 to 2 days following receipt of valid name server data for .gov Domain Registration Services to activate your domain. Expect an additional 1 to 2 days for the update to propagate across the Internet.