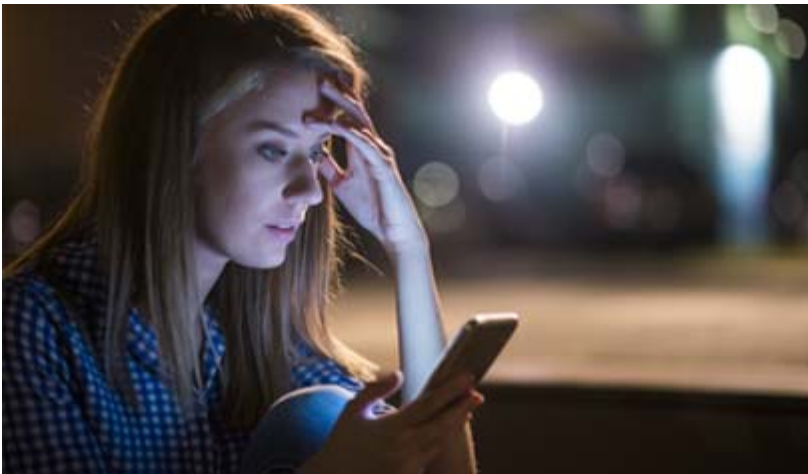


Email Scam Targets PTOs and PTAs



DRAGANA991/THINKSTOCK

What you need to know to protect your parent group from a phishing scam targeting volunteer organizations.

08/28/2017

You probably know to carefully check out emails that claim they're from your bank or credit card company, but increasingly, scammers are using information available online to create emails that look like they come from a friend or a fellow volunteer.

Law enforcement officials in several states have called attention to a phishing scam targeting school parent groups and neighborhood associations: Scammers get officer names and email addresses online, then send an email that appears to be from a group officer, asking the recipient to make a financial transaction.

Check out Finance Manager—accounting software built just for PTO leaders

Enter email

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What To Watch Out For

The emails typically ask for thousands of dollars to be sent by wire transfer the same day, or for a large check to be sent by overnight shipping. Beware of any email message that requests a large sum of money, as well as any message that asks for money to be processed without going through your parent group's usual procedures. Watch for any messages that are unusually worded or that don't sound like they come from the person you know.

Here's what to do if you receive an email that looks suspicious:

Verify

Call or text the person the email appears to be from to find out if they sent it. Don't attempt to verify the email by responding to it.

Alert Authorities

Save the suspicious email and alert your local police department about the attempted fraud.

You can also file a complaint online with the [FBI's Internet Crime Complaint Center](https://www.ic3.gov/complaint/default.aspx) (<https://www.ic3.gov/complaint/default.aspx>). According to an FBI spokesman, it is not necessary to have lost money to a scammer to submit a complaint, and consumers do not need to answer every question on the form.

In addition, you can report the phishing attempt to the [Anti-Phishing Working Group](https://www.antiphishing.org/report-phishing/) (<https://www.antiphishing.org/report-phishing/>), an international group of law enforcement, government, and business organizations.

Spread the Word

Make sure all of our group's officers are aware of the scam. As a courtesy, contact the parent group leaders of schools in neighboring districts. And if there's a PTO or PTA council in your area, share the news with that group, too.

Educate Leaders

Make sure all officers and committee chairs understand the procedures for making payments to vendors or requesting reimbursements.

Review Financial Safeguards

Require a paper trail for each withdrawal from the bank, whether it's an electronic transfer, a debit card transaction, or a written check. (You can find sample forms in the [File Exchange](http://www.ptotoday.com/filessharing/category/12-treasurer-forms) (<http://www.ptotoday.com/filessharing/category/12-treasurer-forms>).)

For more on steps to protect your group's money, read [5 Smart Financial Controls](http://www.ptotoday.com/pto-today-articles/article/395-5-smart-financial-controls) (<http://www.ptotoday.com/pto-today-articles/article/395-5-smart-financial-controls>).

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