

# Design Guidelines for the Citizen-Centric Report

## Visual Appeal & Readability

The physical design and the way in which the report is written is just as important as the information that it contains. If the report does not look visually appealing, then no one will read it. Be sure to include pictures from your community and charts and graphs wherever possible (**TIP:** don't include pictures of buildings, instead use landscapes and people). Include the organization's seal/logo on the front page.

Another important item is to make sure the report avoids accounting terms and other technical language. Refrain from using acronyms. Remember, this report needs to be understood by average citizens, most of whom do not have a degree in accounting! Also, don't try to cover every inch of each page with information. Instead, leave some areas empty (referred to as white space) as this helps to emphasize more critical information.

## Physical Layout

For ease in relaying information to the reader, a consistent column grid should be used. Aligning objects such as charts, text boxes, images and graphics to the edges of a column in the grid allows for clear page organization and easy-to-read data. Each page should have the same margin width, same number of columns and a header or footer that is consistent throughout the report to keep it cohesive. White space should not be "trapped" in between two or more elements, but, if used, should be kept to the outer edges of the main content.

## Colors

The report should use a limited color palette, ideally no more than two or three unique colors. Lighter shades of the same color can be used to add variation without distracting the reader from finding the core text and data provided. For similar reasons, overly bright or clashing colors should not be included in the color palette.

## Images and Graphics

Any images or photos included should take into consideration the distribution method of the report. For any reports distributed electronically (as a PDF via e-mail or Internet), the image resolution required should be at least 72 dots per inch (dpi) at actual size. If the report is to be submitted for printing in a newspaper or other printed publication, images will need to be at least 300 dpi at actual size. Any graphics such as tables, charts or graphs should be consistent throughout the report in general execution (size, colors used, type size/font of captions and labels).

## Type and Fonts

Fonts should be limited to two font families, generally a serif font (such as Times New Roman) and a sans serif font (such as Helvetica or Arial). Font size should be no smaller than 10-point size to accommodate for easy reading, lack of crowding, and to reduce temptation to add too much extraneous information to the page so that the audience can glean relevant and pertinent information quickly from the report. To convey an obvious hierarchy of information, headline, subhead and body text treatments should remain consistent throughout the report. This includes the text size, font and color.

## Publishing Software

If your organization has an in-house design staff, then they will have software they use to design brochures and reports. If you do not have access to a graphic designer, you can use Microsoft Publisher to layout your report.

## Distribution of Your Report

It is important to get your report into the hands of your citizens, right after you have completed it. First and foremost, load it onto your organization's website. If you can, include it in your local newspaper. Print copies and distribute them throughout your community at the library, at government buildings, at coffee shops. Mail copies to your citizens. Give the local chamber of commerce copies to distribute. Take copies to the next council meeting. Hold a press conference. The possibilities are endless. AGA has compiled a Media Package located on the AGA website that includes a sample press release, how to work with the media, how to write an op-ed piece, etc.

**Above all, do not reinvent the wheel! Go to the AGA website and click Completed Reports in the Citizen Centric Reporting section. See copies of actual completed reports along with a Q&A section with individuals who put the reports together.**

## AGA—Advancing Government Accountability

AGA's initiative to encourage governments to provide meaningful and understandable information about the financial condition and performance of the government to its citizens has cumulated in a four page citizen centric report. Such a report would ultimately answer the question, "Are we better off today than we were last year?"

This template offers guidance on the physical design, readability and distribution of a report. Make use of the **Content Guidelines** document to see what information should be included on each of the four pages.

Contact Susan Fritzlen at [sfritzlen@agacgfm.org](mailto:sfritzlen@agacgfm.org) and/or 800.AGA.7211 with any questions.

Visit AGA on the web  
at [www.agacgfm.org](http://www.agacgfm.org).

