



National Citizen-Centric Government Reporting Initiative Media Advisory

MEDIA ADVISORY

for DAY, DATE, TIME

CONTACT: CONTACT, daytime phone, cell phone, email@email.com

[CITY/STATE/COUNTY] to Release Citizen Centric 'State of the Government' Report

Concise, Easy-to-Read Reports Part of a National Initiative to Increase Citizen Awareness and Citizen Participation over CITY/STATE/COUNTY Priorities

WHAT: The [GOV'T ENTITY NAME] will hold a press conference to introduce the latest report in AGA's national Citizen Centric Initiative.

[ENTITY NAME] will join X states, X counties and X municipalities, adopting a "Citizen Centric" format for easy-to-understand four-page state of the government reports. Saco, Maine, released the first report in the national initiative in March 2007.

AGA's Citizen-Centric Government Reporting Initiative encourages governments to publish short reports that give citizens a better understanding of their government and inform a more meaningful debate about fiscal priorities, performance results and future challenges. These reports seek to answer the question "Are we better off today than we were last year?"

WHO: [Insert participants in press conference. Recommendations include the elected figurehead of the governmental entity; the entity's public accountant; and a prominent citizen/head of a local business.]

WHEN: TIME, DATE

Media availability to follow [IF APPLICABLE]

WHERE: LOCATION

ADDRESS

The Association of Government Accountants is a 15,000-member professional Association that serves government accountability professionals by providing quality education, fostering professional development and certification, and supporting standards and research to advance government accountability. For more information about the Association, call 800.AGA.7211, or visit AGA's website at www.agacgfm.org.

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AGA.

National Citizen-Centric Government Reporting Initiative Press Release

For Immediate Release
DATE

CONTACT: Media Contact, day phone
cell phone / email@email.com

[GOV'T] Joins National Initiative to Issue Easy to Understand 'State of the Government Report'

Concise, Four-Page Reports Among the First in Nationwide Program to Facilitate Citizen Understanding
and Participation in Debates on Fiscal Priorities, Performance Results and Future Challenges

CITY, State—The [GOV'T] released a four-page 'state of the government report' today, as part of a national initiative by the Association of Government Accountants (AGA) to bring clarity to reporting in municipal, county and state governments. In doing so, [ENTITY – e.g., Maricopa County] joined X other states, counties and municipalities in adopting the model used by AGA's Citizen Centric Initiative, which kicked off in March 2007.

The initiative aims to bring more citizens into discussions over local priorities by making government financial documents short and easy to understand. Through this nationwide campaign, the AGA has encouraged municipal, county and state governments to publish straightforward reports about their fiscal condition, performance and future challenges that provide an honest and clear answer to the question "Are we better off today than we were last year?"

[SAMPLE QUOTE FROM AGA] "Government fiscal assessments generally read like telephone books, with more pages of footnotes than the average citizen knows what to do with," said Relmond Van Daniker, AGA executive director. "The Citizen Centric project is about getting back to what accountants are meant to do – crunch the numbers and make them understandable for the people we serve."

The reports measure performance in Fiscal Year 2006, complete with the past year's accomplishments as well as the challenges that lie ahead. It lays out in easy-to-read charts: [INSERT REPORT'S COMPONENTS] The full report is available at [URL].

[INSERT REPORT HIGHLIGHTS, e.g, Portland's] The City of Portland report celebrates a number of successes in 2006, including being named "America's Cleanest City" by Reader's Digest. Other accomplishments include the creation of the largest free wireless network of its kind in a U.S. city; the improvement of overall satisfaction with police services for the first time in several years; and the continuation of a 10-year decline in the crime rate, which have brought crimes against persons down 56 percent. Moving forward, the city lists among its challenges an increasing street maintenance backlog and a steadily increasing adult homeless population.

[SAMPLE QUOTE FROM LOCAL OFFICIAL] "Good governance requires good information. The Citizen Centric project allows us to engage Portland residents on the question of fiscal priorities in a format short enough to start more Portlanders discussing these issues," said Drummond Kahn, Portland's Director of Audit Services in the City Auditor's Office. "For residents, this is the equivalent of taking a look at your city's check book—where the money came from and where it went. And that informs a better civic discussion." Last year, the city auditor's performance measurement report, its 16th annual, received an AGA National Award for Excellence—for the third year in a row.

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AGA National Citizen-Centric Government Reporting Initiative Press Tip Sheet

PRESS TIP SHEET

This tip sheet is to serve as a guide as you organize and publicize future Citizen Centric events – as well as general tips in garnering earned media.

GETTING STARTED

- **Get to know the lay of the land.** Look at what media outlets are in the target community (daily newspapers, TV stations, radio stations, weekly/community newspapers, websites and—if applicable—blogs). Take note of who has covered city/county/state government and how they've done it. Look at how similar community events have been covered.
- **Begin building a press list.** Get phone numbers, fax numbers and email address (if possible) for all of the news outlets and keep it in a well-organized spreadsheet. If there are organizations partnering with AGA for the event (i.e., City Hall, League of Women Voters), they may have press lists you can build from. Don't be afraid to call the news desk and ask who covers city/county/state government, as well as who covers events in your community. Be sure to include calendar editors, the people who compile a list of what's going on in town.
- **Know the messages you're trying to get across.** If applicable, create a fact sheet and/or talking points documents to make sure each speaker is "on message." (For Citizen Centric, these talking points are often the reports themselves). Ensure that your speakers and anyone who will be talking to the press memorize these. Work them into sound bites and build a case in your head for the event's newsworthiness. Imagine yourself trying to convince a reporter to cover the event.
- **Think strategically.** When planning your event, you can make choices that will help tell your story to the press. If you want to get cameras (video and photo), make sure there's a good visual—a compelling image like the ones you see on the nightly news. With speakers, think of who is notable and might attract media. Consider pairing unlikely allies (political opponents, for instance), a tactic that can also be helpful in post-event media work. Politics might make strange bedfellows, but strange bedfellows make news.

MATERIALS

Press List

- Update it regularly.
- Keep precise notes of messages sent and voicemails left.

Media Advisory

- This document serves as the "who, what, where, when" for journalists in order to get the event on their radar. It is typically written in the future tense. Briefly introduce the event in a paragraph announcement and then spell out the Ws. Make it easy for a journalist to find the event's key stats (speakers, time, location, etc.) just by glancing at the sheet. (See the template provided).

Press Release

- This document, on the other hand, typically is distributed the day of the event and is often included in a press kit at the event. It is typically written in the past tense and reads like a news article. Make sure to put the piece of news in both the headline and the first sentence. Include quotes from the speakers at the event and/or the event's organizers.

- **HINT:** On occasion, some smaller outlets have been known to take the release and print it with only making a few minor changes. While you can't guarantee this will happen, it is best to make the press release as close to "printable" as possible. This means to keep the text impartial, with the opinions and emotion inserted only in the quotes from the speakers. (See the template provided).

Press Kit

- Sometimes all you need is the press release, but on many occasions it's helpful to include other information for journalists who cover the event—a speakers list with bios (in order, with titles and correct spelling of the names), a background document on the issue (in Citizen Centric's case, this could be a one-pager laying out the project's goals), and the reports themselves.

Letters to the Editor

- Letters to the editor, when appropriate, help to reinforce the message you want to get across. Encourage supporters to write short letters to the editor in praise of (or, better yet, with a balanced look at) the Citizen Centric report. These are usually about 200 words, max., but you should check on each individual publication's limitations. Be sure to give the writers everything they need—talking points, the email address and rules of submitting the letters, etc. Use the message themes to build from.
- **HINT:** You can ensure the letters are on-message by writing the letters to the editor in-house and asking your supporters to sign them and send them in. This allows you to control the messages going out and also takes some of the pressure off of your supporters.

Opinion-Editorials

- Get your event speakers or organizers to write a longer piece, getting across why the Citizen Centric reports are a fresh change of pace in government reporting. It is often helpful just to call a newspaper's editorial page editor and ask if they'd be interested in an op-ed written by your author, in order to avoid unnecessary labor. Op-eds should not be too essay-like. Rather, jump right in and get to the point. (See post-event media relations below AND the "Tips for Op-eds" document provided).

HOW TO REACH OUT TO THE PRESS

- **Send, then call.** Fax or email the advisory and follow up on it that day (within a few hours, if possible). Journalists get a ton of these things, so draw their attention to it by calling and giving them a run-down of the event. Leave a message and follow up on it after a day or two; don't be offended if a journalist doesn't call you back.
- **Be brief.** News stories require concise, succinct messages that can be made into short quotes or sound bites. But most of all, respect the reporter's or editor's time. Journalists are often on deadline and need you to keep it short and sweet.
- **Have a plan.** Know what you're going to say before you get on the phone. It is often effective.
 - Confirm he or she has received the document. (If not, make sure you have the right email address and resend it.) "I'm calling to make sure you saw a media advisory I sent a little earlier today."
 - Briefly describe the event. This is your pitch, your chance to make the case of why this event is newsworthy. (Remember: Having an event is not news; you need to get across that what is being delivered at the event is both newsworthy and compelling).
 - Confirm he or she is the right person to be speaking with.
 - Gauge his or her interest. Sometimes, they'll say if they're interested, but most times it's easiest just to ask "Do you think this sounds like something you'd be likely to cover?"
- **Know the outlet and tailor your pitch accordingly.** If it's a local community paper, pump up the local angle. If it's a television station, tell them about the visuals, etc.
- **Make it personal.** Journalists often look to humanize their articles and reports with real-life stories. Consider telling the story of your event through the people who are organizing it or participating in it. Find the compelling stories and use them in your pitches, especially to the journalists who are interested or on the fence about covering it. (This is probably harder to do with the release of the Citizen Centric report, but if an opportunity presents itself, jump at it).
- **Make his or her job easier.** Make spokespeople and the event's organizers available to be interviewed before and after the event. Just because a journalist can't make it to an event doesn't mean he or she can't cover it. (See Post-Event Media Outreach below as well).

BEING INTERVIEWED

• Before an Interview

- Research the interviewer and the outlet
- Develop 3 to 4 key messages
- Develop facts, anecdotes or examples that back up the key messages
- Anticipate difficult questions

• **Use every opportunity to bridge to your message.** “Bridging” is a rhetorical tool to get from a difficult question or line of conversation to the heart of your message, such as “But the point is...,” “But the real question is...,” “What is important is...,” and “We have to remember that...”

• Control the Interview

- Remember that you are the expert
- You can’t control the questions, only the answers. Use the questions as platforms for your messages.

• **Hook the reporter.** Make reporters listen to your key points by using phrases such as “There are three things your readers/listeners/viewers should know...” or “There are a couple of ways to answer that question. First...”

• **Tips for Radio:** For radio interviews, voice quality and expression are critical. Try to picture your audience and speak to them

• **Tips for TV:** Talk conversationally. Use short answers and avoid too much detail. Keep eyes on the interviewer, not on the camera. Natural hand movement is fine, as long as it’s not excessive.

• Tips for Print and Online:

- Nothing is off the record—don’t say anything you don’t want to see in print.
- Speak in short, complete sentences.
- Give the sound bites you want to see quoted in the article.

TIMELINE

• **Right now. Start to prepare. Build your press lists.** Think of strategy and how you’re going to go about getting press coverage for the event.

• **2 Weeks to 10 Days Away:** Distribute the advisory (by fax and email, if possible) and make follow-up calls to the calendar editors and your key journalists. You’re just looking to get it on their radar, get them thinking about how they’re going to cover it and make sure it’s in any community calendar the publication publishes.

• **1 Week Away:** To your top target outlet (if there is one – and there often isn’t), pitch a story that would run in advance of the event—a profile on an interesting speaker or even just a preview of the event. Prepare an op-ed, if possible, to run in the days leading up to—or, better, on the day of—the event. If applicable, send in some letters to the editor.

• **2-3 Business Days Before:** Resend the advisory. Make follow-up calls to all journalists and ask if they plan to cover the event. Follow up, follow up, follow up! (Don’t assume someone received your voice messages). Push for your top outlet to publish an op-ed or a preview story to run in advance of the event.

• **The Day of the Event:** Make one last round of calls to anyone you haven’t gotten a solid answer from. Prepare a media sign-in sheet – with name, outlet, email and phone – to keep track of the journalists who come. (See the post-event media for how to work with those who didn’t). Distribute the release immediately after, shortly before or—if possible—during the event.

AT THE EVENT

- **Make the media sign-in visible.** Ask all journalists and photographers to sign in. Type this list up and compare it with your media list.
- **Ensure that each reporter gets the story he/she wants.** Ask them if they have any questions or if they'd like to speak to anyone. If the reporter wants to talk to the organizers or the speakers, make them available. It's a good idea to keep track of them and even to check in with them on occasion as the event progresses and after it ends.
 - Make sure the photographers have the shot they want.

POST-EVENT MEDIA - IMMEDIATE

- **Look for the articles and follow up.** Use your media sign-in to keep track of each reporter and what/when they cover the event. Most of the time (except for weekly papers), it's within the first 24 hours. If you haven't seen an article from a reporter you know attended the event, don't be afraid to call and ask when he or she expects the story to run.
- **Follow up on the release.** Remember, just because someone couldn't attend the event doesn't mean they can't cover it. Some smaller outlets that don't have a large amount of staff might even run a news story that you can offer to prepare for them. Include photos from the event.
- **Follow up on the deadbeats.** Call the reporters who said they would attend, but didn't. You're not looking for an apology; you're looking for a way to get the story written. Ask if they'd like an interview with an organizer or a speaker at the event.

POST-EVENT MEDIA - LONGER-TERM

- **Plan.** Think about the post-event media before the event happens. Be creative. [Note: Many outlets begin planning for in-depth money/taxes stories for the coming year in December. Plan accordingly if you can.]
- **Get the most bang for your buck.** Again, reaching out to the press is not about getting coverage for the event; it's about getting your message to a wide audience. Often, the most important part of a media strategy is the way you capitalize off of the initial coverage of the event.
- **Pitch an op-ed piece that uses the event as a hook to reinforce the importance of the Citizen Centric report.** If it makes sense to do so, send in follow-up letters-to-the-editor thanking outlets for their coverage and reinforcing the messaging.
- **Ask the newspaper to editorialize.** This is often a long shot, but is always worth a shot under two scenarios:
 - The outlet has provided a surprisingly high level of attention to the issues.
 - The outlet has published an op-ed by key spokespeople.

But the report is not only about what's good in [ENTITY]. [INSERT CHALLENGES LAID OUT IN REPORT].

[ADDITIONAL QUOTE FROM LOCAL OFFICIAL] “[ENTITY] reminded us today that bringing citizens into the discussion about priorities is what American government is all about. That's a lesson so many of our local governments can learn from.”

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