Public Attitudes Toward Government Accountability and Transparency

Relmond Van Daniker, DBA, CPA
Executive Director
AGA
**Budgeting** – planning for the administration
- Leadership, responsibility

**Accounting** – relationship between the appropriation and the actual expenditures
- Federal & state differences
- Audits

**Performance** – what did we get for our money
- Quantitative vs. Qualitative

**Reporting** – how and to whom should the information be reported
Public Attitudes Toward Government Accountability and Transparency 2010

- Follow-up to 2008 poll on attitudes and opinions towards government financial management and accountability to tax payers.

- Survey was conducted online within the United States by Harris Interactive on behalf of the AGA between November 30 and December 7, 2009 among 1,024 adults aged 18 or over. Propensity score weighting was used to adjust for respondents’ propensity to be online.

- “We commissioned the survey for a second time to shed some light on the way the public perceives those issues relating to government financial accountability and transparency that are important to our members. Nobody is pretending that the figures are a shock, but we are encouraged to have seen some improvements since 2008.”
  - Relmond Van Daniker, DBA, CPA
  Executive Director, AGA
Public Attitudes Toward Government Accountability and Transparency 2010

• 75% of Americans believe that the availability of government financial management information is very important

• The public is least satisfied with the financial management information they’re receiving from the federal government

• After hearing a description of Recovery.gov, 76% indicated they would be likely to either visit or return to the site

• Approximately 80-90% voted in the 2008 federal, state and local elections. Roughly 75% of these people say that financial management information was an important factor in their decisions

• Overspending and/or wasting money is a top concern about government financial management across all levels

• Reflecting the past two years, the public generally considers state and local government financial reporting to have stayed the same, and federal to have gotten worse
Solid Findings, AGA Moves Forward

• “The survey results include some extremely stark, unambiguous findings. Public levels of dissatisfaction and distrust of government spending practices came through loud and clear, across every geography, demographic group and political ideology. Worthy of special note, perhaps, is a 67 percentage point gap between what taxpayers expect from government and what they receive.”
  - Jennifer Haskins, Harris Interactive

• “AGA members working in government at all levels are in the very forefront of the fight to increase levels of government accountability and transparency. We believe that the traditional methods of communicating government financial information – through reams of audited financial statements that have little relevance to the taxpayer – must be supplemented by government financial reporting that expresses complex financial details in an understandable form. Our members are committed to taking these concepts forward.”
  - Relmond Van Daniker, DBA, CPA
    Executive Director, AGA
Improving Communication Between Government and Taxpayers

AGA is committed to increasing the levels of transparency and accountability and driving understanding among the general public.

 Citizens have a right to an understanding of how governments are spending their money and if it is being efficient and effective.

Not many governments are communicating this information to their citizens and if they do, the information is too technical for the average citizen.
Citizen Communications Effort

AGA believes that governments should communicate information to their taxpayers in a way that is:

- Clear and understandable
- Updated regularly and often
- Delivered to all and easy to locate
- Honest in breadth and technically accurate in detail

AGA’s four-page Citizen-Centric Reporting model provides practical assistance to help governments achieve this.
Constructing A Report Doesn’t take a Super Human Effort!

Resources Available:

• Content Guidelines

• Design Guidelines

• Media and Communications Templates

• Completed Reports – Don’t Reinvent the Wheel!
AGA Citizen-Centric Reporting Model

Content Guidelines

• Page 1
  o Strategic Objectives - What we’re required to do
  o Demographic information

• Page 2
  o Notable Accomplishments - top services
  o Performance metrics (non-financial) for services

• Page 3
  o Revenues and Expenses - pie charts

• Page 4
  o What’s Next? Future Challenges?
  o Infrastructure items
What is the Government Chartered to do?

Vision Statement

Strategic Goals

How the government is organized

Demographics

Table of Contents
AGA Citizen-Centric Reporting Model

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Performance Information on Key Missions and Services

* Obtain input from citizens on what measures they would like to see included

* Report on non-financial outcomes for 3 or 4 key missions or services (public safety, public health, roads, parks and recreation, schools)
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Revenues and Expenditures

* Include revenue and cost data for major areas
* Use pie charts
* Reference audit conducted
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Future Challenges and Economic Outlook

* Include items specific to the community that will have future effects (economic changes, tax cuts or increases, major new employer, employer leaving, unemployment, technological improvements, infrastructure improvements, education, environmental aspects, being transparent, etc)

* Ask for feedback by including a contact name and contact information
Design Guidelines

Visual Appeal & Readability

Use of Pictures and Graphics, Color

Ample White Space (not text heavy)

Free of technical jargon

Professional designer or publishing software
www.agacgfm.org/citizen

Content Guidelines
Design Guidelines
Templates –
  Microsoft Publisher
  Microsoft Word
  In-Design
Completed Reports
Distribution – Get the Information to Your Taxpayers

- Print in local newspaper
- Post to website
- Print bulk copies – libraries, grocery stores, city hall, schools
- Hold a press conference
- Mailing lists
- Governor’s office, City/County Officials
- Activist Groups, League of Women Voters
Obtain and Track Feedback

• What do Your Citizens Think About the Report?
• Do they Want to See Other Items Included?
• Web statistics – Hits on Page Report is Located
• Calls to Government Offices
• Mentions in the Media
Completed Reports

AGA

**State:**
- State of Oregon
- State of Nevada
- State of Maryland
- State of South Carolina
- State of Texas
- State of Washington
- State of Washington Audit
- TN Comptroller of the Treasury
- Office of Management Services, Comptroller of the Treasury, State of Tennessee
- Massachusetts Developmental Disabilities Council
- Idaho State Police

**Federal:**
- Architect of the Capitol
- Denali Commission
- U.S. Coast Guard
- U.S. DoD
- U.S. Dept of the Interior
- USAID
- General Services Administration
- National Science Foundation
- Treasury Franchise Fund

Completed Reports Posted at http://www.agacgfm.org/citizen/completed.aspx
Completed Reports (cont’d)

**County:**
- Blount County, Tennessee
- Clark County, Washington
- Palm Beach County Tax Collector, Florida
- Guilford County, North Carolina
- Saint Louis County, Minnesota
- King County, Washington
- Maricopa County, Arizona
- Benton County Treasurer, Washington
- Springfield-Greene County Health Department
- Pinal County, Arizona
- Polk County, Wisconsin

**City:**
- City of Portland, Oregon
- City of Saco, Maine
- Washington D.C.
- City of Tallahassee, Florida
- Village of Los Lunas, New Mexico
- City of Bellevue, Washington
- City of Jefferson, Missouri
- City of Las Vegas, New Mexico
- City of Stamford, Connecticut
- City of Columbus, Indiana
- City of Portsmouth, Virginia
- City of Honolulu, Hawaii
- City of Kauai, Hawaii

**Other:**
- FMI Canada
- Riverview Psychiatric Center
- Guam Community College
- Dorothea Dix Psychiatric Center
AGA Citizen-Centric Reporting Model

AGA believes that these reports will make governments more accountable to their citizens, and will help Americans become better educated and better able to participate in government activities.

Citizen-centric reporting is an important practical step that governments can take in raising their game in accountability and transparency.

The program is an essential component of AGA’s Advancing Government Accountability Mission.
A pessimist sees difficulty in every opportunity.

An optimist sees the opportunity in every difficulty.
Don’t let the perfect get in the way of the good.
If one has to defend against all of the things that could go wrong, nothing will every be accomplished.
What is CGFM?

➢ Earning the designation
  • Education
  • Examinations
  • Experience
  • Ethics

➢ Maintaining the certification
  • AGA Code of Ethics
  • Annual renewal
  • CPE requirements
What makes the CGFM unique?

- Specialized focus on government financial management
- Broad coverage of various aspects of financial management at all levels of government
Why CGFM: employer/public benefits

- Increased knowledge of government financial management
- Greater confidence on the job
- Better understanding of “big picture” of government
- Tool for identifying qualified candidates and training new employees
- Enhanced credibility, public confidence and employee value
- Commitment to professional development and continuing education
Why CGFM: individual benefits

- Increased knowledge of government financial management
- Greater confidence on the job
- Better understanding of “big picture” of government
- Portable and tangible indicator of experience and knowledge
- Enhanced marketability throughout all levels of government
- Encourages employer incentives and continuing education
AGA is the Thought Leader in Advancing Government Accountability and Transparency

www.agacgfm.org