



## Elements of An Annual Report: A Brief Guide for Non-Profits

By Rebecca Hoffman

**The annual report is the dreaded, but important, one-time-a-year publication that every non-profit should publish. Besides the fiduciary responsibility to offer transparency regarding its financial status, a nonprofit can greatly benefit from a well-designed, timely “snapshot” of the year’s achievements. Frequently, nonprofits take too long to publish their annual report and by the time it reaches stakeholder hands it seems unimportant or dated. The proactive organization should plan to have the report printed and ready for distribution as soon as the financial results for a given year are settled.**

The essential elements of a well-produced annual report include:

- A lovely cover that invites reading
- A mission statement prominently stated
- Great-looking photos of staff (not the blurry, deer-in-the-headlights candid we too often see in publication)
- The nonprofit brand and any taglines prominently displayed
- A letter from the Executive Director and perhaps from the Board Chairperson (where appropriate)
- A prominently placed listing of the Board of Directors/Trustees
- A concise overview of services
- Annualized statements of achievements and data (how much, how many, to whom, why and when descriptors)
- Brief statements explaining complicated relationships (valuable when organizations cross-work with universities, think tanks or other community organizations)
- Descriptions of sub-groups that may be “nested” within the primary nonprofit (such as alumni groups, affinity groups, donor societies)
- Listings of any volunteer or junior boards (don’t forget to use this opportunity to thank everyone who helped through the year and use this as an opportunity to demonstrate organizational depth).
- A listing or summary of media hits or instances when the organization was mentioned in the press
- A listing or summary of publications, events or serialized public programs which support the overall mission.
- Well-designed financial statements which – ideally – depict the prior year and the current year.
- A bound-in donor envelope so people know the nonprofit is always ready to receive a gift.
- A roster of all donors, volunteers and other professionals who contributed time, money and service to the organization. Remember to include cash donors as well as in-kind donors along with corporations, foundations and individuals.
- Always be sure to honor donor wishes to remain anonymous.
- List any gifts made in “memory of” or “honor of” to ensure stakeholders see all the ways people can support the organization.
- Include a list of all staff and committees that were active during that year.

- Furnish a list of acronyms accompanied by definitions. Often organizations use a lot of shorthand and donors need to know what is meant by every abbreviation.
- Include “back matter” which includes copyright and acknowledgement of any photo credits, an opt-out from mailing and marketing materials, a statement of non-profit status and a very brief statement of the intention of this publication.

**Once you have all of these materials gathered you are ready to begin the exciting work of designing a beautiful, but not necessarily expensive, annual report which can be proudly shared with the broader audience and further reinforce the important work of your nonprofit. Design your report with an eye toward the next year so that each year the design work gets easier, create a template of information and plan to refresh the design each year so that when more than one edition of the annual report is shown they look related but not the same.**

**With these ideas in mind you will be well on your way to creating a timely report that your audience will enjoy reading.**



#### **About Good Egg Concepts**

**Based in Chicago, Good Egg Concepts is a communications consultancy focused on providing compelling communications, marketing strategies and creative services to businesses and organizations. Led by Rebecca Hoffman, Principal, we form creative teams as needed by specific projects. Everything we do, we do with a sense of humor and purpose and always with a watchful eye for your bottom line. Contact us to learn more about how Good Egg Concepts can help you.**

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