

ELGL Content Contributors' Style Guide - V.8

New additions to V.8:

GIFS & Avoiding Digital Blackface (also in Images & GIFS section)

"**Digital Blackface**" refers to the way which technology allows non-Black people to "try out" Black identities online. Digital Blackface can range from non-Black people creating fake twitter accounts posing as Black (often posting anti-Black messages, or defending anti-Black celebrities) to non-Black people excessively using reaction GIFs featuring Black people.

It is important to be mindful of the ways different races are represented in the images and gifs you choose to use on social media and in the articles you publish for ELGL.

It's not about not showing Black images, it's about being mindful of the way Black people (and all marginalized people for that matter) are represented in your images and ensuring that you are not furthering harmful, stereotypical representations of any group of people.

Learn more: <https://guides.library.illinois.edu/socialmediaaccessibility/digitalblackface>

General notes

Articles written for ELGL use an informal and conversational tone, though not at the cost of clarity or correctness. Most of our readers are local government employees. One of our main goals is to humanize local government and local government workers; if you write with ELGL's members in mind and sound like yourself, you are most of the way there.

Proofread All Content Thoroughly

At ELGL, we post content on a daily basis. Please proofread your work before submitting it to help us maintain our steady output of quality writing. Some tips for proofreading your work:

- 1.) Read your work out loud.
- 2.) Proofread a printed version of your work.
- 3.) Ask someone to proofread your work.
- 4.) Go back and proofread after taking a break.

Be Concise

Strive to keep content concise, specific, informative, and clear.. Please use contractions and keep sentences short. Aim to keep blog posts somewhere between **400-1,250 words**. If your post is longer than 1,250 words, plan to break it into two or more parts.

Avoid Use of Acronyms and Abbreviations

A few universally recognized abbreviations are required in some circumstances. Others are acceptable depending on the context. In general, avoid using alphabet soup (a common problem we share in the local government world). Do not use abbreviations or acronyms that the reader would not quickly recognize or that may have multiple meanings.

Clarity

One of the best ways to make content clear and usable is to use [plain language](#). When we use words people understand, our content is more reachable, accessible, and inclusive.

Some helpful [plain language](#) tips:

- Logical organization with the reader in mind
- “You” and other pronouns
- Active voice
- Short sentences
- Common, everyday words
- Easy-to-read design features

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

ELGL strives to champion diversity, equity, and inclusion. In service of this goal, we ask that you be thoughtful of the language you use when writing about sensitive topics. Here are a few quick guides to use as a reference if you're unsure:

[AP Stylebook Race-Related Coverage](#)

APA Style: [General Principles for Reducing Bias](#)

House Style

ELGL Generally generally follows the Associated Press Stylebook for correct grammar (capitalization, punctuation, abbreviations, etc). This is to ensure consistent and clear communications for our members.

AP Style Quick Reference Guide

Questions about the AP Style Guide? See the following [quick reference guide](#) from the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment for tips.

Notes about ELGL House Style:

- **Commas:** We prefer the use of the Oxford Comma.
- **Article titles should be written in Title Case Format:** title case format includes capitalizing the first and last words in the headings, as well as nouns, pronouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, and subordinating conjunctions. Conjunctions, coordinating prepositions, and articles typically remain in the lowercase.

Avoid Sponsored Content

At ELGL, our members come first. We strive to make our work accessible and free from sponsored content to ensure trust and accountability with our work. We welcome content from businesses working with local government, but ask that you refrain from selling or marketing your product(s) on your posts unless we have signed off on it beforehand.

Guest Content Submission Guidelines

We love receiving content from our members! We receive content on a wide variety of local government topics with contributors coming from all agencies and departments. We ask that when you submit content you include the following:

- Submission Title
- Your name and a brief bio (see instructions below)
- A final draft in either Word or GoogleDoc format
- Photo(s) for the article

Author Bios and Photos

All guest blog posts and articles should be accompanied with a short bio, listing your title, work location, a photo of yourself, and your contact information so our members can connect with you. This can include links to your LinkedIn and Twitter accounts. Bios should be no longer than 40-50 words.

Categorizing Your Content

We ask that all content fall into the following categories. Articles may fall under more than one category.

- Arts & Culture
- City Clerks & Recordors
- City Council, Mayor, & City Manager
- Communications & Engagement
- Data & Technology
- Equity, Diversity, * Inclusion
- Innovation

- Legal
- Planning & Shaping Cities
- Professional Development, Skill-Building, and Human Resources
- Purchasing & Procurement
- Strategic Planning & Program Management
- Work/Life Balance, Self-care, & Inspiration

Don't see the appropriate category here? Let us know so we can create one!

Images & GIFS

Please include an image you would like to use as the featured image for the article. **Do not use copyrighted images. Please let us know if you have questions about if an image is okay to use.**

This photo will be used on our social media channels and the ELGL website. Some image tips:

- You may use your headshot or another image you own or you may use free high-resolution stock images from websites like unsplash.com or pixabay.com.
- Some applications you can use to edit your images include gimp.org or Paint on your computer.
- We encourage you to use fun images throughout your article. These can be GIFs (giphy.com), memes, or any other creative images to help convey your message.

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Event Submission Guidelines

When you are submitting or creating an event on behalf of ELGL, please include the following information:

- Event Name
- Contact name, phone, and e-mail
- Location of event including city and state
- A photo we can use to promote the event (this can be anything that has to do with your city, town, etc!)
- A short 2-3 sentence description of the event for social media and our email newsletter
- A longer event description for EventBrite and our website
- A brief bio for the speakers, moderators, facilitators, etc.

Promoting Your Content

We post the majority of our content on our social media channels, including Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. The best way to increase readership of your content is to cross-post content on your personal social media channels, and to get your friends, colleagues, home organization, and partner organizations to share on their respective channels. The more people who share, like, and retweet your content, the more it amplifies your message. Please let us know if you have questions about how to better promote your content.

Submitting Your Content

Send all articles and content to Allie Breyer, ELGL Digital Coordinator, at allie@elgl.org. Feel free to reach out with any questions, comments, or ideas. After we receive your article, it will be slotted into our content and social media calendar.