2023 Research Report Style Guide

Report Format

Report Length and Style

- Overall, the body of the report, not including references and appendices, shall not be longer than 50 pages, unless otherwise approved by Center staff.
- Reports must be written in an accessible style, for a lay audience.

Title Page

- Project title
- Project Investigator(s) (names and degrees/professional designations)
- Title/Position and Department
- Host institution and affiliated institution(s)/organization(s)
- Email address and phone number for Project Investigator
- Acknowledgement statement of the Grantor's support for the project:
    - "This project was made possible, in part, by a grant from the Center for Rural Pennsylvania, a legislative agency of the Pennsylvania General Assembly."

Abstract (300 word limit)

Key Words (Provide 3-5 words/phrases for search purposes)

Executive Summary (1,500 word limit). The Executive Summary will be detachable from the final report for distribution as a free-standing document. It should **bullet point key findings and policy considerations**, and briefly explain the following:

- Purpose of the study
- Methods used
- Project results
- Conclusions

Table of Contents – The Table of Contents should be clickable and linked to the major topic headings and subheadings, and include the following:

- Major topic headings
- Topic subheadings
- Page numbers
- List of tables or figures

Introduction

- State the problem
- Review relevant literature (in an accessible manner for lay readers)
- Justify the project's purpose and need
- State the project's goals and objectives

Methodology

- In detail, describe the study design and all components of the work plan
- If using case studies, discuss why and how particular cases were selected
- If applicable, refer and adhere to the "Surveys" section of this document

Results and Findings

- In detail, describe the data obtained during the study
- Data should be consistent with the rest of the study
- Any results achieved beyond the scope of the project should be identified
- Include deliverables specific to the project
- If using case studies, use a subheading for each case study and note findings

Discussion and Policy Considerations. Because the Center for Rural Pennsylvania's Grant Program seeks to identify research-based policy considerations for the Pennsylvania General Assembly, executive branch, and local governments, it is imperative that this section of the report be thoughtful. Policy recommendations must be driven by the project data and findings, and in detail, must accomplish the following:

- Provide justification for each policy consideration that emerges directly from the research results
- Focus on rural Pennsylvania or issues related to it
- Provide clear, research-based, unbiased recommendations for policymakers to consider
- Be specific about what agency or organization should address and/or implement each of the considerations
- Where pertinent, refer to existing state programs, infrastructure, statutes, or regulations
- Include policy or program considerations addressing specific barriers or opportunities relating to the research findings

- Identify any public funding sources, program guidelines, industry practices, and unique situations that occur in Pennsylvania's rural areas that have a bearing on the consideration
- Researchers may also, and are encouraged to consider, comparative policy analyses to discuss how other jurisdictions address a given policy concerns (these may be other municipalities, counties, states, or countries).

Conclusions

- Conclusions must be supported by findings and data
- Include a summary of the report's key points

References

- For citations in the running text of the report or at the end of a quotation, use an author-date citation format, such as (Author, 20XX). Include a comprehensive list of sources cited and provide complete information for the author-date citation given in the text. A consistent citation format must be followed throughout the entire references section.

Appendices (Include only necessary supporting documentation for inclusion in the online report. Place copies of articles generated about the project by local media here, as well).

Additional Requirements

Definitions and Language
Rural Definition

- Research funded by the Center will use one of our definitions of rural (unless otherwise approved by the Center prior to project start-up).

Other Definitions

- Other terms in your report must be defined, especially those that are used as criteria for selecting best practices. For instance, if using the word "successful" or "effective," explain what criteria were used to determine success or effectiveness.
- Define terms when first used in the body of the report. Where there is a multitude of terms specific to a topic, some researchers provide a glossary of terms. While this is not required, it can be very useful and, if provided, should be located in an appendix.

Jargon

- All reports must be free of jargon specific to a field and must initially spell out all acronyms and keep their use to a minimum.
- Discussion of any analytic or statistical models especially must be translated into language understandable by the lay reader. Technical details may be included in an appendix.

Surveys

For presentations of surveys prepared for the research project, provide the following:

- What was the purpose of the survey?
- Was the survey done by mail, phone, in-person or online? Why was this method selected as the appropriate approach for collecting data?
- How were survey participants selected?
- How were names, phone numbers, addresses and/or email addresses found?
- How many surveys were attempted? How many were completed? How did this rate compare with what was expected?
- What was the response rate? What methods were used to increase the response rate?
- What were the margins of error/confidence intervals for the survey results?

If applicable to the research project, provide analyses of survey results by rural/urban responses and by region.

Provide a copy of the survey questionnaire as an appendix to the report. Also provide the frequency of responses to each question as part of the appendix.

All raw survey data must be submitted to the Center with the final report.

Interviews

For discussions of key informant or other interviews, provide the following information:

- What was the purpose of the interviews?
- Were the interviews done by phone or in-person?
- Who conducted the interviews?
- How were the interview subjects selected?
- How many interviews were attempted? How many were completed?

Provide a copy of the interview protocol as an appendix to the report.

Focus Groups

To describe the focus group sessions, include the following information:

- Where was the focus group discussion held?
- How were participants selected?
- How many focus group participants were anticipated? How many actually participated?
- Who conducted the focus group?
- How were discussions recorded?

The presentation of focus group results must keep actual quotations from participants to a **minimum**. Additional quotations from the focus group may be included as part of an online appendix.

Data and Technical Information Presentation

- When discussing data sources used for the project, provide a discussion of any data limitations. This also holds for discussions of survey or interview results. For surveys with small respondent pools or response rates, discuss the reliability of the survey results.
- Explain any statistical analyses or tests done on data (such as T-tests, Ordinary Least Squares, Anova, etc.) in terms that lay readers can understand. Explain why the tests were selected, what they measure and what they show. Provide the rationale for using selected variables in analyses performed for the project.
- If providing technical details necessary for deeper understanding of data analyses or statistical tests, locate the information in an appendix. This will enhance the readability of the body of the report for the lay reader and will allow readers who are looking for the technical basis of the report to easily find this information.
- When referencing time-based information, like the enactment of a bill or the date of survey collection, use the actual date and not phrases like "last year."
- Tables and charts must be blended into the text where they are discussed to enhance readability and simplicity.
- In the body of the report, use numerals for all percentages referenced.
- Write out the word "percent" instead of using the symbol. For all numbers referenced in the report, use numerals for the number 10 and above. If a number begins a sentence, it must be spelled-out and not presented as a numeral.
- The final report must include the data behind all charts, tables, maps, or graphs. These data should be in Excel, SPSS or another approved format. When publishing the findings, we often need to manipulate charts and graphs in our publication software and so we need this backup information.

Format

For ease of editing and transfer to publication software, <mark>please use the Center template</mark>, or submit your final report in the following format:

- Use Microsoft Word (please see below for website reader accessibility formatting. Turn on and keep accessibility checker running when writing your report. Please continuously review and correct any accessibility errors).
- Comply with the "Website Reader Accessibility" section requirements (see next section for more information on alternative text and related accessibility matters).
- Font must be Tenorite, size 12 (use Tenorite Display for headings)
- For line spacing, use multiple spaced at 1.08
- Color charts, graphs, maps, etc., are acceptable – please use easy to view color palettes and be consistent when using color to identify specific variables.
- Left justification only
- 8 x 11 standard format
- Begin page numbering after the table of contents (or list of figures); continue consecutively until the end of the last appendix.
- If notes are necessary in the body of the report, use footnotes and not endnotes.

- The report may be written in first person.

All charts, tables and maps in the report must:

- Include a title and chart, table, figure, or map number
- Include accurate labeling of columns, rows, axes, etc.
- Be referenced in the report text
- In a caption, identify the source and timeframe of data therein
- In a caption, identify whether financial figures are adjusted for inflation
- In a caption, identify whether differences in statistical data are statistically significant (if applicable)
- In a caption, identify the geographic level of the data (state, county, municipality, etc.)
- Be understandable to a lay audience
- Be consistent in format
- Use the most current data available (for example American Community Survey), where applicable
- Indicate the number of respondents (if showing survey results)
- Be created using Microsoft Excel or Word
- Be sized to at least 300dpi (graphs and images)
- Where possible, maps should include the name of the jurisdiction.

Website Reader Accessibility:

- Please add your metadata to the Word document.
  - **File: Info: Properties: Advanced Properties:** add the appropriate information - title, tags, add subject, author.

  Styles - Use Word's given styles to select Heading 1 (project title only), Heading 2, Heading 3, and so on. Each heading will be a new section of the document and subheadings will follow with Heading 2, 3, etc. Proper nesting order is important- do not use a heading 2 and then a 4, skipping the 3. These allow the user to skip sections using the clicks of a keyboard. Go to **Review: Check Accessibility: Navigation Pane** to do a quick check to make sure the headers are OK.

Alt Text- All figures need descriptive alt text. If an error appears in your accessibility results, click on the drop-down arrow. Add a description of the figure. In some instances, the figure/image may be decorative. In these instances, mark it as decorative.

Link Text- For any web/citation links, be descriptive (For example: Color Contrast Tool) and do not use the words "click here," or type the entire URL. Screen readers do not like spelling out URLs and "here" is not descriptive.

Tables- when creating any tables, DO NOT split cells, merge cells, or create nested cells. Each table should have a header row and you should be able to tab through the table.

- Right click on the table and go to table properties.
- Here you can add alt text and select header rows. (See [Creating accessible tables in Word](#) for more information and [Accessible Templates for Office](#) for accessible table templates.) If tables are created in Excel and placed into Word, be sure to reformat in Word by applying Table Styles (go to **DESIGN: Table Design,** and **Table Style Options**: select Header Row and First Column only.)

Charts- It is important that you create your charts in Word or create them in Excel and paste into Word. Use the chart wizard to build them within the ribbon. Be sure to include color contrast within line styles and use different line styles, such as dotted lines and broken lines. Charts should be readable in black and white. Use the "Chart Design" function in Word for this.