

Backgrounders and Fact Sheet

Backgrounders and fact sheets are important organizational documents because they are used in a variety of contexts. In general, both are organizational documents used to support organizational initiatives, campaigns, programs, etc.

Backgrounders and fact sheets are used for promotional materials, they are provided to media representatives when information about an employee of the organization is sought, they are used in times of crises to prepare quick summary documents, and they are often used in internal documents to provide rationales for decisions/procedures and to establish organizational climate. Backgrounders and fact sheets often describe how an organization/product/service evolved or was created, or they may talk about an individual within an organization. Finally, backgrounders and fact sheets are useful historical documents that can be used to support feature stories, newsletters, and other internal and external documents. In short, backgrounders and fact sheets are very important.

Backgrounders often fall into two general types: backgrounders about organizational figures, and backgrounders about the organization itself or a product or service. Backgrounders typically contain a lot of text—although biographical backgrounders are typically one page long. Examples of backgrounders include one-page summaries of organizational leaders, the one-page historical description on the back of menus are a form of backgrounders, and informational text describing an organization's products or services written as part of an annual report or for representatives of the media are also forms of backgrounders.

Backgrounder Information

- Your backgrounder should be written with a particular audience in mind: professionals, investors, regulators, visitors, the media, or customers.
- Your backgrounder should be interesting.
- Your backgrounder should include organizational logos, and contact information when standing alone.

Consider the following when writing a backgrounder

- It might address ten points that could be covered in a five to ten minute speech introducing your organization to the local Chamber of Commerce.
- It might employ the 5Ws and H structure.
- It might employ a Q & A (question and answer) format.
- It might be written according to an acronym: "T-R-U-S-T," etc.

For a Backgrounder on an organizational member consider the following:

- May take one of three forms: the data sheet, the straight chronological, or the narrative.
- Include: Date of hire, position within the company, educational qualifications, civic activities and memberships, family information (husband/wife/partner (if appropriate), kids, pets).
- If writing a narrative biography, you may include personal quotes.
- Provide enough information for a journalist to be able to create a brief narrative introduction.

Fact sheets are used to provide supporting information. They are often created on short notice to respond to crises, requests for information, or special events. Fact sheets are also created to provide supporting material about products/services in media kits, at community events, and on the Internet.

Fact sheets are often more creative, utilizing graphics, dingbats, and artwork. Typically, fact sheets say “Fact Sheet” in big letters across the top and are comprised of bulleted lists of “Q&A,” “FAQ,” or “Key Facts” format. Occasionally fact sheets are heavy on text—see samples.

Fact sheets often put a new twist on everyday information. Take for example a small winemaker who produces 5 million bottles of wine a year. With a little math we discover that if 5 million bottles were stacked end-to-end they would stretch from New York City to Niagara Falls and back again (see additional examples below).

Fact Sheets should do the following:

- Backgrounder should contain complete organizational contact information.
- Backgrounder should be visually appealing. Utilize graphics, dingbats, and artwork when appropriate.
- Use simple, short, sentences and bulleted lists.
- Backgrounders often address 6–12 key points about the organization and/or its products.
- Backgrounders often include answers to FAQ’s, Q&As, etc.
- Backgrounders often take the 5Ws and H, question and answer format.
- Backgrounders often make the “information” interesting by employing metaphors, comparison/contrast, simile, etc.

Samples:

M&L’s Candles

- If all of the candles sold annually in the U.S. were stacked end-to-end they would reach to the moon and back.
- The Vatican alone purchases Five million candles annually.
- Candles cost less to manufacture and burn than the cheapest form of fossil fuel.

Guagliardo’s Winery

- The average American drinks 20 gallons of wine per year. If those bottles of wine were stacked end-to-end, they would circle the globe 116 times.
- The FDA had determined that the consumption of one or two glasses of wine each day reduces the chance of a heart attack by 20%.

ICGC

- The average Fortune-500 executive reads ten books a year, watches less than 50 hours of television, and encourages his children to major in Business or Marketing.
- Students who play chess score 20 percent higher on the SAT—regardless of their SES.

Plagiarism_is_Bad.Org

- Seventy percent of all college students report having plagiarized at least once in their college careers. This number is up from 25 percent in 1970, and 5 percent in 1960.
- If every student caught cheating in the U.S. each year were fined just \$100, the nation deficit could be erased in two years (before George Bush the younger, of course).