



TAI Collaborative Style Guidelines

Introduction

The TAI Collaborative is a global platform dedicated to strengthening trust, accountability, and inclusion. Through our editorial content: blogs, op-eds, reports, and newsletters, we aim to elevate diverse voices, share learning, and influence practice and funding for participatory governance.

This Style Guide outlines the standards, processes, and conventions we follow to maintain clarity, consistency, and quality across all publications. It ensures alignment with our values and helps contributors produce content that reflects our collaborative mission.

1. Editorial Tone and Voice

Our writing should be:

- **Direct but reflective:** We communicate clearly and with intention, encouraging thoughtful reflection on complex governance issues. Avoid vague, passive sentences that don't challenge assumptions or prompt reflection.

Example: *Donors want impact, but impact takes time. What if long-term support for civic actors mattered more than headline results?*

Avoid: *In today's complex world, we must deeply consider the various layers of democratic engagement and their inherent challenges.*

- **Accessible yet informed:** We strive for a balance between experts' insight and public accessibility. Avoid unnecessary jargon that excludes non-expert readers, making it hard to engage with.

Example: *Corruption isn't just a policy issue; it affects whether schools get built or medicines reach clinics. Strong transparency laws can change that, and here's how.*

Avoid: *The lack of regulatory harmonization in public procurement frameworks exacerbates inefficiencies in the fiscal governance ecosystem.*

- **Grounded and values-driven:** All content should embody TAI Collaborative's commitments to trust, transparency, and inclusive governance.

Example: Communities shouldn't have to guess how decisions are made. At TAI, we support funding approaches that put transparency and public participation at the center.

Avoid: We support several governance initiatives in developing countries, based on donor interest and availability of funds.

- **Respectful and inclusive:** Use inclusive language, avoid stereotypes, and reflect the diversity of voices we aim to amplify.

Example: From grassroots organizers to policy advocates, people across regions and identities are shaping governance in powerful ways. Our work seeks to elevate their perspectives and ensure they are heard, not just consulted.

Avoid: Even the poorest communities can offer surprising insights if donors take the time to listen.

2. Formatting Guidelines

To ensure uniformity, contributors must follow these formatting conventions:

- **Organization names:** *Italicize all organization names* (e.g., *TAI Collaborative, Ford Foundation*).
- **Author names:** Display in **bold** either at the start or end of a piece, depending on the format.
- **Titles of articles or reports:** Use “quotation marks” for all titles of blogs, op-eds, reports, and external publications.
- **Acronyms:** Always spell out the full name on first reference, followed by the acronym in parentheses. Use the acronym thereafter.

Example: Open Government Partnership (OGP)... then OGP throughout the rest of the document.

Option: If the abbreviation is exceedingly common and the piece is informal, you may use the abbreviation only (e.g., *UN*).

- **Dates:** Always state the date at the beginning of the piece. Use the format “12 May 2025”.
- **Spelling:** Use United States English (e.g., “Color”, “Organize”, “Center”) when writing in English. For names, use English spelling, eg, Seville, not Sevilla, unless the publication’s context or audience requires otherwise. Check with the Communications Officer if in doubt.
- **Grammar:**
 - Place commas inside quotation marks.
 - Use double quotation marks, except when a quotation appears within another quotation.
 - Follow standard American style conventions (e.g., use “vs.” with a period, not “vs”).
 - Place footnote references after the period or comma, not directly after a word, unless there is a compelling reason to do otherwise.
 - Always use the Oxford comma in lists.
 - Check bullet points for consistent end punctuation (either all with periods or all without, as appropriate).
 - Ensure consistency in subtitles: if one is a full sentence, aim for the rest to follow the same format.
 - Keep subhead capitalization consistent (choose either title case or sentence case and apply it throughout).

- Use hyphens consistently with key terms (e.g., either “low-income country” throughout or “low income country” throughout).
- Avoid unnecessary, incorrect, or excessive capitalization of nouns.
- **Names and numbers:**
 - Verify the spelling of all names. Ideally, confirm the correct spelling of *all* personal names mentioned in a piece.
 - Ensure consistency in how numbers are written.
 - Spell out numbers from one to ten; use numerals for 11 and above (e.g., *seven, 15, 536*).
 - Keep currency formats consistent. Preferred style: **\$3.5 billion** (not \$3.5B or \$3.5bn).
 - In highly technical pieces, specify currency and year, e.g., **in 2022 USD \$3.5 billion**.
 - Be consistent in using either “%” or “percent.” If “40 percent” is used early in a document, apply the same style throughout unless the symbol is more appropriate (e.g., in tables or graphs).

3. Language and Inclusivity

- Avoid gendered, colonial, or exclusionary language
- When referring to people, use their preferred pronouns and identifiers
- When citing case studies or locations, ensure the geographic and cultural context is accurate and respectfully presented
- Use the following specific terms:
 - **Global Majority**, → instead of *Global South, or Countries from the South, or underdeveloped countries*
 - **Historically marginalized communities** → instead of *minorities or underrepresented groups*.
 - **Underfunded or under-resourced communities** → instead of *poor or impoverished communities*.
 - **Countries with emerging economies** or **lower-income countries** → instead of *third world or underdeveloped*.
 - **People with lived experience, partners, or grantees/grantee partners** → instead of *beneficiaries or recipients*.
 - **Racially and ethnically diverse communities** → instead of *minorities or non-white populations*.
 - **Colonized and formerly colonized nations** → instead of *post-colonial nations*.
 - **Frontline communities** or **communities most affected** → instead of *vulnerable populations*.
 - **People of all genders** or **gender-diverse communities** → instead of *women and men*.
 - **Locally led or community-led initiatives** → instead of *local aid projects*.
 - **Historically excluded geographies** → instead of *remote or peripheral regions*.

4. Readability

- Use subtitles or subheadings to improve clarity and navigation.
- Preferred font: Arial, size 12.
- For longer documents, insert a table of contents at the top
- Verify the Table of Contents is correct (e.g., titles and page numbers) as edits may change these, and it needs to be refreshed
- Break up very long sentences with multiple clauses into shorter, clearer sentences.
- Break up long paragraphs containing multiple points into smaller, focused sections.
- Define unusual or lesser-known terms early in the document.
- Verify that all references to later sections (e.g., “see page 10”) remain correct after edits.
- Remove inappropriate color changes in text, which often occur from copying and pasting.
- In the final version, ensure all links are working and visible (not hidden).

5. Images, Graphs, and Visuals

Visual clarity is essential for engagement and accessibility. When possible, include:

- **Graphs, charts, and tables** to illustrate key findings. Label tables, charts, graphs, and similar with titles and numbers.
- **Photographs** to contextualize stories or humanize data
- **Infographics** to summarize complex processes or frameworks
- **Always credit the source** of any photo, infographic, or chart unless it is original work or publicly available under a Creative Commons license. Include the Creative Commons license information as needed and the standard description of TAI (check with your Communications Officer)
- **Do not use AI-generated images** unless explicitly approved by the **Comms Officer**.
- Avoid cliché or stereotypical imagery (e.g., generic photos of people in poverty).
- All images must be **high resolution** and **ethically sourced** (i.e., no exploitative depictions).

Please send pictures to the Communications Officer as high-quality attachments (JPG or PNG). **Submitting them as part of a Word document, in the body of an email, or via WhatsApp is not acceptable.**

6. Content Guidelines by Format

A. Blogs and Op-Eds

- **Length:** 800–1,200 words
- **Tone:** Personal, reflective, or analytical. First-person voice is acceptable.
- **Content:** Timely perspectives, field learnings, commentary on policy shifts, or calls to action.
- **Structure:**
 - Strong opening hook
 - Clearly developed argument or insight
 - Closing with reflection, solution, or question for the reader
- **Bylines:** Include a short author bio (30–50 words). Add disclosure if the author is affiliated with TAI Collaborative.
- **Timeframe:** Allow **one week** for internal review and scheduling.
- **Promotion:** Share the link with relevant partners and **repost on social media** using the original publication link.

B. Reports

TAI Collaborative reports serve as analytical, advocacy, or learning documents, and they should be accessible, evidence-based, and well-designed.

All reports should include:

- Cover page with title, subtitle (if needed), date, and authors
- TAI Collaborative logo and partner logos, where applicable
- Table of contents for any report over 10 pages
- Executive Summary (1–2 pages)
- Citation section ([Harvard/APA](#))
- Acknowledgments (optional)
- Page numbers and consistent formatting throughout

Specifics:

- **Length:** Variable (10–40 pages), depending on scope
- **Purpose:** In-depth analysis, practical recommendations, or documentation of impact
- **Tone:** Neutral, evidence-based, solution-oriented
- **Structure:**
 - Executive Summary (1 page)
 - Introduction (framing the context and audience)
 - Clear, data-informed analysis
 - Actionable recommendations
 - Annexes, citations, and references
- **Visuals:** Use tables, infographics, and pull quotes to enhance understanding
- **Formatting:** Consistent use of section headers and numbering where appropriate
- **Timeframe:** Minimum **two weeks** from draft to publication (longer for co-authored or translated materials)
- **Promotion:** Contribute to the promotion via sharing TAI newsletters, social media posts, and TAI website publications. Link to a downloadable PDF and share a branded summary visual if available.

C. Newsletters

i. TAI Weekly (General Audience)

- **Audience:** Funders, Practitioners, academics, civil society, policymakers, and the general public
- **Tone:** Light yet informative, with a mix of news, analysis, and curated links
- **To submit a pitch for TAI Weekly:** Send a three/or four-sentence paragraph describing the resource you want to be included. Provide links and visuals when available. You can also provide links to events, opportunities, podcast and videos.
- **Publishing Day:** Tuesdays, 3.45 PM CET
- Deadline for submissions: Thursdays, 6.00 PM CET

7. Preferred Citation and References Style

We follow a modified version of the [Harvard/APA referencing style](#) for in-text citations and bibliographies. Reports must include citations for all factual claims, data points, or references to other research, whether quoted or paraphrased.

In-text citation examples:

- According to Smith (2022), participatory governance improves civic engagement.
- Fiscal transparency remains low in many countries (Open Budget Survey, 2023).

Quotation examples:

- As noted by *Transparency International* (2021), “corruption is both a cause and a consequence of poor governance” (p. 14).
- “We had to adapt our tools for a context of shrinking civic space,” said **María López**, program lead at *Accountability Watch*.

Bibliography examples (placed at the end of the report):

- Open Budget Survey (2023). *Global report: Transparency in public budgets*. International Budget Partnership. <https://www.internationalbudget.org>
- Smith, J. (2022). *Reclaiming Public Trust*. Oxford University Press.
- Transparency International (2021). *Global Corruption Report 2021*. Berlin: TI Secretariat.

8. Editorial Process, Workflow, and Timeline

All editorial content must follow this workflow:

1. Send a proposal to the **Communication Officer**, with a **copy to the Executive Director** for initial feedback.
2. The Author submits the first draft to the **Comms Officer**.
3. Comms Officer provides comments, edits, and suggestions
4. Senior members of staff also review and provide comments.
5. Long think pieces and reports are forwarded to the **designated editor**
6. The draft is sent back to the author to work on the suggestions made by the editorial team.
7. For reports, visual explainers, or stylized blog posts, the draft is sent to the design/layout team
8. Authors will have one round of feedback on the layout.
9. Comms Officer coordinates the final version and confirms the publication format
10. Please allow minimum of **1 week** from submission to publication for blogs and op eds. And minimum **2 weeks**, for Reports or longer if external co-authors or translations are needed.

9. Promotion and Dissemination

- Authors should collaborate with the dissemination as much as possible. Use the **original TAI publication link** when reposting on social media. Tag relevant partners and institutions. If the content is part of a larger campaign, coordinate hashtags, visuals, and timing with the Comms Officer. When sharing on social media, always tag TAICollaborative and maintain tone consistency with the platform.

10. CrossPosting

Whenever possible, TAI encourages cross-posting of content with partners to increase reach and engagement. When sharing TAI-authored pieces on partner platforms, or reposting partner content on TAI channels, we ensure proper attribution, maintain original meaning and context, and link back to the primary source.

When cross-posting content originally published by TAI, please allow at least 24 hours after the TAI publication date and always use the TAI link as the source. All cross-posting requests should be coordinated through the communications team to align timing, messaging, and visuals for maximum impact.