Welcome to Sunlight's Editorial Guide!

In this guide, you will find instruction and guidelines for content, styling and distribution of your most excellent blog posts. If we've missed anything, let us know.

## CHECKLIST FOR PUBLISHING

* **Use Google Docs for collaborative drafting**. Once a post is finalized, move the copy into the CMS.
* Use a **descriptive yet brief headline** less than 70 characters long.
  + **Optimize the headline and post for search engines** (SEO). That means choosing a phrase people will be looking for on Google and making sure you use it 4-5 times in the post.
  + **Optimize the headline for social media** (SMO). Remember, the headline autopopulates a tweet. Social sharing is driven by emotion and signaling, but make sure the copy matches the post. Avoid using questions or "clickbait" that overpromises.
  + **Workshop different headlines** with your team using Slack.
* **Always insert a photo** at the top of a post and **choose a featured image**. Using videos or visual embeds are great to help a story but don't auto-populate in social media or show on the blog. The featured image is what will show up on social media and our website’s blog page.
* **Add the appropriate metadata** to your post: tags, channels, etc.
* Make sure to **add a two sentence summary** to the excerpt field. This will be the copy used to share it on Facebook.
* After you enter your post into Wordpress, always **notify a director when you'd like to publish and promote** **it**. They'll let you know if there are any issue with the factual content, any conflicts with other work, and help plan the best time and strategy to engage your target audiences.
* **Write 3-4 tweets** that pull out the most interesting quotes, maps, graphics, facts or other elements of the post that will engage people.
* **Preview** to ensure the formatting looks good visually when you publish or update a post.
* Always **get a second pair of eyes to review the preview** for style, structure, good links, or anything else. Make sure to look on mobile: an increasing number of our audience reads us on smartphones with small screens.

## **Style Suggestions**

### **Why AP style?**

In this case, consistency is not the hobgoblin of petty minds, but a friend of readers. Following some basic rules of the writing road will help our copy look more professional, and make it easier for other organizations to pick up and drop onto their pages.

### **Here are a few tips for avoiding common "misteaks."**

#### **How to refer to elected officials**

Always indicate a politician's party and state. That's useful context for readers.

##### **The easiest way to do this is thusly on first reference:**

Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., or Rep. Paul Ryan, R-Wis.

But, if it works better you can deliver the information in your narrative.

Establishment Republicans ranging from Arizona Sen. John McCain to Wisconsin Rep. Paul Ryan are trying to keep their distance from the tea party.

If you are talking about a state legislator, say so, e.g.

Maryland state Rep. Don Dwyer apologized for his drunk driving convictions today.

**ALWAYS CHECK NAME SPELLING.**

Get into the habit of linking members names to their profiles on GovTrack. When you look up a profile, you often stop yourself from misspelling a name or getting a party affiliation wrong.   
 **Speaking of names...**

Use FULL names on first reference. We do NOT use honorifics unless it’s a title that provides the reader with useful information, as in the aforementioned Sen. John McCain. But it’s Joe Jones NOT *Mr.* Joe Jones or, heaven forefend, *Mrs.* Josefina Jones (ask me for the battles your foremothers fought to get rid of that one when you have a couple of hours to spare)

On second reference (the second time a person’s name comes up in the story) use **LAST NAME ONLY**.

President Barack Obama promised to lead the most transparent administration in history. Obama’s record belies that ambitious statement.

If you need to distinguish between two people with the same last name. In that case, use a title or a full name.

President Barack Obama and first lady Michelle Obama travelled Monday to New York City where the president was delivering a speech to the United Nations.

Afterwards, Michelle Obama visited a preschool in Queens, while her husband attended a fundraiser at the Waldorf Astoria.

#### **State abbreviations**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Name** | **USPS** | **AP** |
| Alabama | AL | Ala. |
| Alaska | AK | Alaska |
| American Samoa | AS |  |
| Arizona | AZ | Ariz. |
| Arkansas | AR | Ark. |
| California | CA | Calif. |
| Colorado | CO | Colo. |
| Connecticut | CT | Conn. |
| Delaware | DE | Del. |
| District of Columbia | DC | D.C. |
| Florida | FL | Fla. |
| Georgia | GA | Ga. |
| Guam | GU |  |
| Hawaii | HI | Hawaii |
| Idaho | ID | Idaho |
| Illinois | IL | Ill. |
| Indiana | IN | Ind. |
| Iowa | IA | Iowa |
| Kansas | KS | Kan. |
| Kentucky | KY | Ky. |
| Louisiana | LA | La. |
| Maine | ME | Maine |
| Maryland | MD | Md. |
| Massachusetts | MA | Mass. |
| Michigan | MI | Mich. |
| Minnesota | MN | Minn. |
| Mississippi | MS | Miss. |
| Missouri | MO | Mo. |
| Montana | MT | Mont. |
| Nebraska | NE | Neb. |
| Nevada | NV | Nev. |
| New Hampshire | NH | N.H. |
| New Jersey | NJ | N.J. |
| New Mexico | NM | N.M. |
| New York | NY | N.Y. |
| North Carolina | NC | N.C. |
| North Dakota | ND | N.D. |
| Northern Mariana Islands | MP |  |
| Ohio | OH | Ohio |
| Oklahoma | OK | Okla. |
| Oregon | OR | Ore. |
| Pennsylvania | PA | Pa. |
| Puerto Rico | PR |  |
| Rhode Island | RI | R.I. |
| South Carolina | SC | S.C. |
| South Dakota | SD | S.D. |
| Tennessee | TN | Tenn. |
| Texas | TX | Texas |
| Utah | UT | Utah |
| Vermont | VT | Vt. |
| Virgin Islands | VI |  |
| Virginia | VA | Va. |
| Washington | WA | Wash. |
| West Virginia | WV | W.Va. |
| Wisconsin | WI | Wis. |
| Wyoming | WY | Wyo. |

The Associated Press has its own list of standardized abbreviations for states. NOTE: These are NOT the postal codes. Ie. it's Ariz., not AZ. See the handy guide on the right.

#### **Their/Its**

When using these pronouns, be careful not to confuse a corporation or institution with the people who comprise it.

e.g., The Senate loves **its** arcane traditions; senators still file **their** campaign finance forms by mailing paper copies.

You can say:

Members of the Senate love their arcane traditions.

You'd be an embarrassment to your 4th grade grammar teacher if you write:

The Senate loves their arcane traditions.

#### **Dates**

Use the day of the week if the date you are referring to occurs in the same week as your piece is published.

e.g., President Obama on Friday is expected to unveil changes to the National Security Agency's phone snooping policy.

If the day occurs outside of the week in which you are writing, use the date and include a year if the date is outside the year in which you are writing.

e.g., The United States inaugurated its first African American president on Jan. 20, 2009

#### **Numbers**

Spell out one through nine; use numerals for 10 and above.

#### **Capitalization**

Generally, avoid it. Here in the democratic US of A (as opposed to Deutschland), we capitalize proper nouns (Congress) but **not** adjectives (congressional) and titles (Sen. Debbie Stabenow, President Barack Obama) but not substantives:

The senator is running for reelection; she's hoping for some fundraising help from the president.

#### **Misplaced participial modifiers**

These can be very embarrassing. The word/name or term that is modified by a participial phrase should directly follow it. Otherwise, you can get some incredibly confusing sentences, like this one, lifted from our own local newspaper:

Growing up in Belmont, Mass., Deese's father was a professor of political science at Boston College while his mother worked on renewable energies as an engineer.

Source:<http://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/brian-deese/gIQAqRwlDP_topic.html>

Tips for how to avoid this mortification can be found in the "dangling participle" section [here](http://web.archive.org/web/20150228162622/http://andromeda.rutgers.edu/%7Ejlynch/Writing/d.html).

## **Headline and slug**

Max of 75 characters / two lines to appear correctly on the blog. At the absolute most it should be 118 characters so the headline can be tweeted out with a link and remain under 140 characters.

Make sure your slug (the URL) matches your headline, especially if you change the headline at any time. **However, never change the slug once the post has been published; this will result in dead links from the previous URL.**

Some additional tips, which are a little redundant from above:

* Keep headline brief, be descriptive, use keywords for SEO.
* Tell the story in the headline: Writers don’t necessarily need to leave readers in suspense. Sunlight will employ that over social media to draw readers in.
* Only capitalize the first word and proper nouns.
* Only use single quotes in headlines (e.g. ' and not ")
* Only use numerals in headlines; never spell out numbers (even when below 10)

## **Excerpt**

The new post requires an excerpt. It’s the teaser and small picture that shows up in the main blog page. If you leave it blank, it will automatically pull in the first 20 words.

1. If you don’t see the excerpt field, click on “Screen Options” in the upper right of your screen and make sure the “Excerpt” box is checked.
2. Add up to 40 words. These might be custom or just copy/pasted from the article’s lede.
3. This field won’t accommodate any dynamic media, such as pictures, videos and embeds. Italics, underlining, bold text and links will be retained.

## **Multimedia**

### **Photo Requirements**

#### **Tips: Photos**

* Use [flickr](http://web.archive.org/web/20150228162622/http://www.flickr.com/) creative commons; [wikimedia commons](http://web.archive.org/web/20150228162622/http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Main_Page); [Google image search](http://web.archive.org/web/20150228162622/https://support.google.com/websearch/answer/29508?hl=en) by license; and [istockphoto](http://web.archive.org/web/20150228162622/http://www.istockphoto.com/). If you find something on istockphoto, get in touch to have us purchase it for you.
* *The photo must be common license to protect against copyright infringement.*
* New standards for photos: have one the top of the post, either stretched for full width (720px wide) or in the top-right corner (288px wide).
* Post must include credit for the photo in a caption.
* See resources and guidelines below for code examples and how each format looks on the front-facing site.

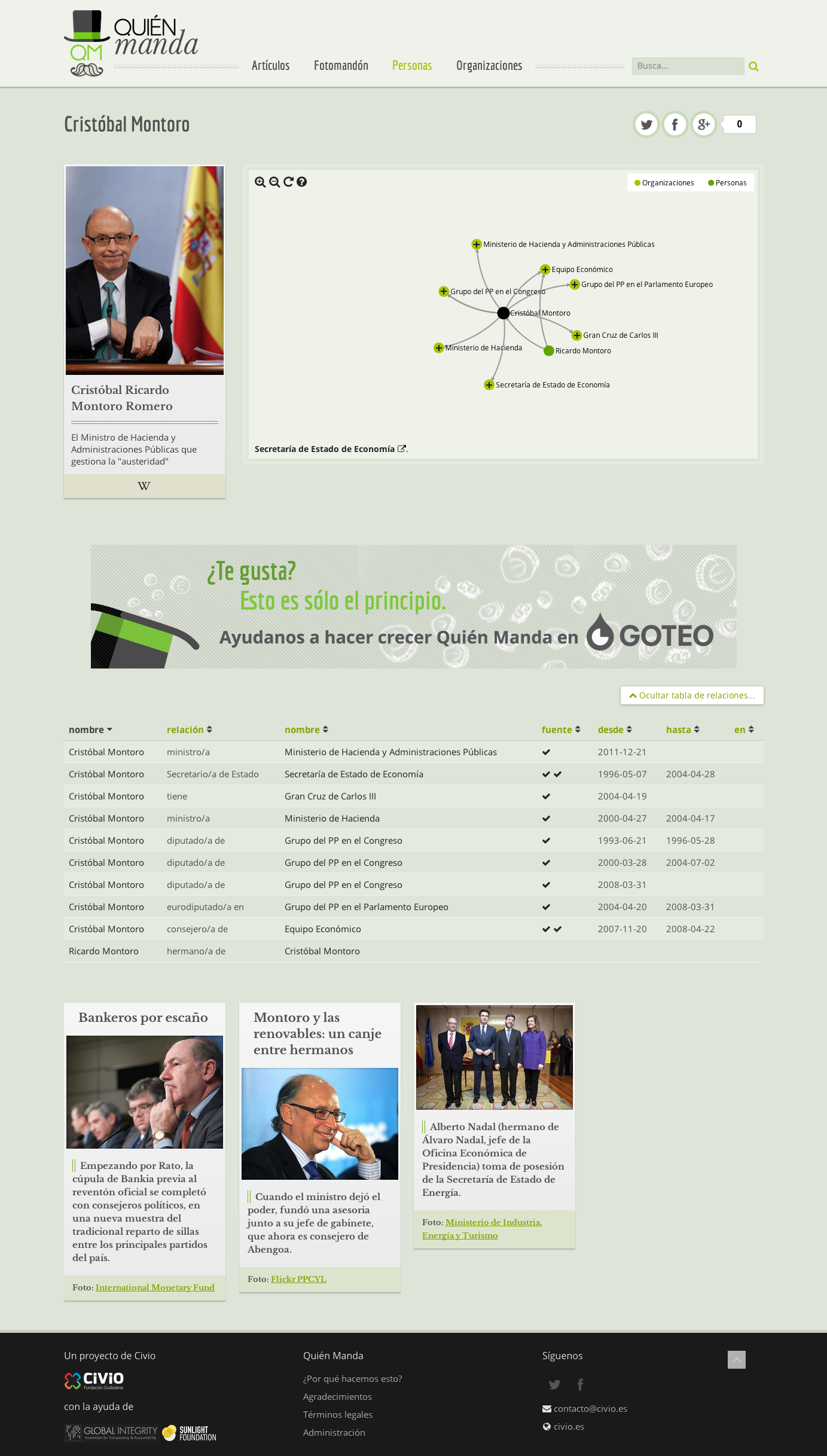
This image has -small appended to it's class. In this case .left-small to keep the small headshot from getting stretched.

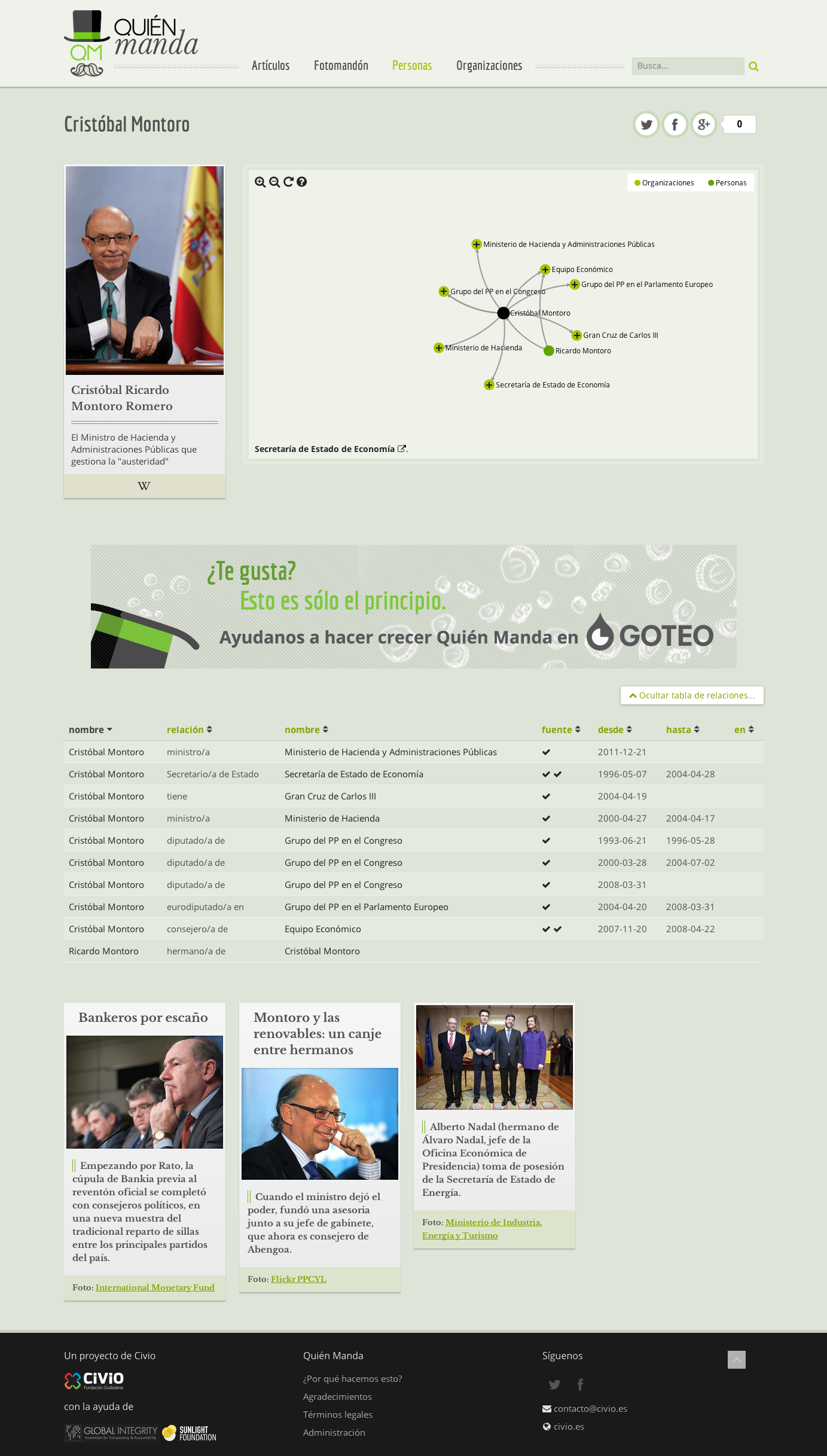
The following text is included to provide context for what these images would look like when floating amongst real content. is simply dummy text of the printing and typesetting industry. Lorem Ipsum has been the industry's standard dummy text ever since the 1500s, when an unknown printer took a galley of type and scrambled it to make a type specimen book. It has survived not only five centuries, but also the leap into electronic typesetting, remaining essentially unchanged. It was popularised in the 1960s with the release of Letraset sheets containing Lorem Ipsum passages, and more recently with desktop publishing software like Aldus PageMaker including versions of Lorem Ipsum.

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This image is displayed at its natural size of 500px wide, with no classes applied to it. All images will be automatically centered if they are not given a class of .left or .right.

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This image started much larger, but by giving it a class of .left, it has been shrunk to 288px wide and aligned left.

  
This image started much larger, but by giving it a class of .right, it has been shrunk to 288px wide and aligned right.

This image started out larger than the width of the blog content area, but by giving it a class of .full-width, it now has a max-width of 720px and is centered to extend to the far edges of the blog content area.

### **Styling figures: photos/video/embeds**

#### **Tips: Video/Embeds**

Images, videos and all non-text inclusions in a blog post can be positioned and sized in one of 4 ways: blockyblock (aka centered), full-width, left and right. The alignment and dimensions will be triggered by adding the corresponding class name to the containing figure.

An image should always be in a <figure> tag. The code for a sample image would look like this:

<figure class="right">  
 <img src="IMAGE LINK">  
 <figcaption>Photo credit: blah</figcaption>  
</figure>

You can replace "right" with either "left," "blockyblock," or "full-width" depending on what you need. You can add a caption with the <figcaption> tag.

### **Photo credits and captions**

Include a brief description of the photo, followed by the source of the photo in parentheses. Include full source and photographer if available.

For example, a photo of Obama would read: "A photo of President Obama. (Photo credit: Pete Souza/Flickr.)

As discussed above, any figure can include a figcaption which can be used to source the content, or to add a caption.

### **Code Example**

<figure class="left">  
 <a href="http://sunlightfoundation.com/media/2013/10/qm\_fullpage1.png">  
 <img src="http://sunlightfoundation.com/media/2013/10/qm\_fullpage1.png" alt="qm\_fullpage" width="1383" height="2435" class="" />  
 </a>  
 <figcaption>Photo credit: blah blah blah.</figcaption>  
</figure>

## **Channels and tags**

Sunlight’s blog is designed to offer users the ability to find posts through several avenues. Nearly every post will be identifiable by its channel and the tags assigned to it. Series and Categories are more specialized groupings of posts to be used strategically.

#### **Channels**

The broadest designation of Sunlight content. Nearly every post has a channel. You can choose multiple channels for a single post.

* Choose your channel: Technology, Policy, Investigation, Multimedia
* If no channel is chosen, the post will only appear in the blog landing page

#### **Tags**

Every post needs tags! They’re the keywords for the blog's internal search. Use the auto-fill function of WordPress to choose tags that already exist.

* General rule: **tag every proper noun and subject**.
* We're trying to avoid tagging one subject in multiple different ways. (You may, however, end up with several issues or themes. See below.) To avoid ‘tag creep’, we’ve set out these specific guidelines. Tag:
  1. **Name(s) of Sunlight tool(s) used**. Check out how to properly spell Sunlight's properties at our [tools page](http://web.archive.org/web/20150228162622/http://sunlightfoundation.com/tools).
  2. **Major politicians named.** [First name, last name] (No title) | John McCain, Barack Obama, Christine O’Donnell
  3. **Major chamber of Congress/agency/organizations mentioned.** Spell out subject and put common acronym in parenthesis | Open Government Partnership (OGP), Federal Election Commission (FEC), National Rifle Association (NRA), Democratic National Committee (DNC)
  4. **Major issue/theme/topics addressed.** IMPORTANT: Use the auto-fill to find correct tag among list | guns, immigration, campaign finance, McCutcheon v. FEC, opengov, open data, election 2012, election 2013, election 2014, etc.
  5. **States discussed** - Spell out full name. | Alaska, Alabama, Michigan.
  6. **Bills discussed** - name and designation, common name. | STOCK Act, DATA Act, VAWA. If no common name, use bill number.

## **Specialized posts - Series**

A planned group of posts around a single theme or topic. They could be re-occurring (OpenGov Voices) or a rollout of posts around a unified topic (One Percent of the One Percent, Open Data Guidelines). These require advance planning and special design elements, so discuss with Comms to see if a series would be feasible and how to roll them out and promote.

## **After you post**

### **Send social team a hook**

Email a hook to the social team so they know how you’d like to promote the post. This is optional but very helpful!

### **Self-promotion**

Use social media to promote your own work. Sunlight can also retweet your output.

### **Monitor comments**

Every author is responsible for monitoring and responding to comments on their work on Twitter and Facebook.   
  
Search for the URL of your post on Twitter to see who is sharing it.  
  
**Corrections and Updates**

How we correct or update a post largely depends on how substantial the changes are. Consult with Alex to determine the proper way to handle it.

#### **Updates**

If a post has new information added to it, there should be a disclaimer at the top with a time stamp saying so. If appropriate, the new piece of information can be identified in this disclaimer; for example: "This post has been updated 12/13/14 at 12:00 p.m. with comments from the FEC."

#### **Corrections**

Again, a disclaimer at the top should be added with a time stamp. The corrections will also be noted below the story as well.

## **Content Styling**

#### **Data Visualization Styleguide**

See our [data visualization styleguide](http://web.archive.org/web/20150228162622/http://sunlightfoundation.com/blog/2014/03/12/datavizguide/) for tips and resources for creating Sunlight branded graphs, charts, maps etc.

In addition to rethinking image and multimedia styles, we've tried to account for all copy styling you might have a need for. If you notice yourself needing something that doesn't seem to be documented here, let us know. If it seems like a common need, we'll do our best to come up with an easy solution that everyone can take advantage of.

### **Blockquotes**

**This is a blockquote.** It can contain simple content, like a paragraph, or more complex content, such as an ordered or unordered list.

Just like New Yorkers themselves, the trees in New York [city] work harder than any others in the world.

1. Warhol
2. Trees

If you include a footer inside of your blockquote, it will be right-aligned.

### **Code Example**

<blockquote cite="http://www.guardyoureyes.org/forum/index.php?topic=4429.10;wap2">  
 <p>  
 Just like New Yorkers themselves, the trees in New York [city] work harder than any others in the world.  
 </p>  
 <footer>  
 <a href="http://www.guardyoureyes.org/forum/index.php?topic=4429.10;wap2">Andy Warhol </a>  
 </footer>  
</blockquote>

### **Header styles**

All header style options can be referenced here. Note the h1 is not listed. It has been reserved for use as the article title only.

## **An h2 looks like this**

<h2>An h2 looks like this</h2>

### **An h3 looks like this**

<h3>An h3 looks like this</h3>

#### **An h4 looks like this**

<h4>An h4 looks like this</h4>

##### **An h5 looks like this**

<h5>An h5 looks like this</h5>

###### **An h6 looks like this**

<h6>An h6 looks like this</h6>

### **Table structure and styling**

If built correctly, your table can have a distinct header row and automatic even/odd zebra striping. A table can take on the same left/right/center properties as multimedia when .left, .right or .full-width is applied to the containing figure.

#### **A table sized based on content width**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Col Header 1** | **Col Header 2** | **Col Header 3** | **Col Header 4** |
| Row Header | Content | Content | Content |
| Row Header | Content | Content | Content |
| Row Header | Content | Content | Content |
| Row Header | Content | Content | Content |
| Row Header | Content | Content | Content |

The table could have a source below it. That source might be [Influence Explorer](https://sunlightfoundation.com/wp-admin/post-new.php) and would be contained inside of a figcaption, the last item inside of the figcaption.

#### **A right-aligned table**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Col Header 1** | **Col Header 2** | **Col Header 3** | **Col Header 4** |
| Row Header | Content | Content | Content |
| Row Header | Content | Content | Content |
| Row Header | Content | Content | Content |
| Row Header | Content | Content | Content |
| Row Header | Content | Content | Content |

The table could have a source below it. That source might be [Influence Explorer](https://sunlightfoundation.com/wp-admin/post-new.php) and would be contained inside of a figcaption, the last item inside of the figcaption.  
  
**A full width table**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Col Header 1** | **Col Header 2** | **Col Header 3** | **Col Header 4** |
| Row Header | Content | Content | Content |
| Row Header | Content | Content | Content |
| Row Header | Content | Content | Content |
| Row Header | Content | Content | Content |
| Row Header | Content | Content | Content |

The table could have a source below it. That source might be [Influence Explorer](https://sunlightfoundation.com/wp-admin/post-new.php) and would be contained inside of a figcaption, the last item inside of the figcaption.

#### **A left-aligned table**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Col Header 1** | **Col Header 2** | **Col Header 3** | **Col Header 4** |
| Row Header | Content | Content | Content |
| Row Header | Content | Content | Content |
| Row Header | Content | Content | Content |
| Row Header | Content | Content | Content |
| Row Header | Content | Content | Content |

The table could have a source below it. That source might be [Influence Explorer](https://sunlightfoundation.com/wp-admin/post-new.php) and would be contained inside of a figcaption, the last item inside of the figcaption.

### **Code Example**

<figure class="right">  
 <table>  
 <thead>  
 <tr>  
 <th>Col Header 1</th>  
 <th>Col Header 2</th>  
 </tr>  
 </thead>  
 <tbody>  
 <tr>  
 <td>Row Header</td>  
 <td>Content</td>  
 </tr>  
 </tbody>  
 </table>  
</figure>

### **List styles**

This is what an unordered (ul) and ordered lists (ol) look like.

* Nulla eleifend magna id ipsum tristique congue.
* Praesent egestas diam ac justo facilisis sagittis.
* Aliquam volutpat massa et tortor scelerisque, vel egestas tellus condimentum.
* Integer interdum mi id felis sollicitudin, vel fermentum purus semper.
* Aliquam luctus est sed neque tempus pretium.
* Sed iaculis tellus eget lacus pretium, et viverra quam vestibulum.

1. Nulla eleifend magna id ipsum tristique congue.
2. Praesent egestas diam ac justo facilisis sagittis.
3. Aliquam volutpat massa et tortor scelerisque, vel egestas tellus condimentum.
4. Integer interdum mi id felis sollicitudin, vel fermentum purus semper.
5. Aliquam luctus est sed neque tempus pretium.
6. Sed iaculis tellus eget lacus pretium, et viverra quam vestibulum.

### **Asides: tangential content**

As you've seen throughout this post, we have created three different styles for an aside. Asides can contain both a ul and a ol. It is recommended that you use an h5 to title your aside and an h6 for additional headers.

##### **A header in an h5 Tag**

Asides should be used for information that is supplemental to the main content in a block post. For instance:

###### **For instance**

* a list of tools used to research the article.
* an explanation of a complex term that was used throughout the article.
* a short bio of someone mentioned in the article.

Asides can also have the .left, .right class applied to them. There is a special aside style called .note that can be seen in use at the top of the styleguide. It is intended for use around introductory text that needs to stand out as 'not part of the post'. We often need something like this at the head of guest posts to introduce the person writing on our blog, since they don't have profiles and are new to the audience.

##### **Another**

A person might use this style and structure from time to time to pull out tangential information from the blogpost itself. Lists of related links? Tools we used in researching the article. Let's say you *DO* use a list here.

###### **What would it look like?**

1. [Nulla eleifend magna id ipsum tristique congue.](https://sunlightfoundation.com/wp-admin/post-new.php)
2. [Praesent egestas diam ac justo facilisis sagittis.](https://sunlightfoundation.com/wp-admin/post-new.php)
3. [Aliquam volutpat massa et tortor scelerisque, vel egestas tellus condimentum.](https://sunlightfoundation.com/wp-admin/post-new.php)
4. [Integer interdum mi id felis sollicitudin, vel fermentum purus semper.](https://sunlightfoundation.com/wp-admin/post-new.php)
5. [Aliquam luctus est sed neque tempus pretium.](https://sunlightfoundation.com/wp-admin/post-new.php)
6. [Sed iaculis tellus eget lacus pretium, et viverra quam vestibulum.](https://sunlightfoundation.com/wp-admin/post-new.php)

### **Code Example**

<aside class="right">  
 <h5>Another </h5>  
 <p>This is an example of code for an aside</p>  
  
 <h6>What would it look like?</h6>  
 <ol>  
 <li>List item one</li>  
 <li>List item two</li>  
 </ol>  
</aside>